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WHY, WHEN, HOW,

AND

WHAT WE OUGHT TO READ.

BY

REV. J. L. O'NEIL, O.P.

Attend to reading.—1 TIMOTHY iv, 13.

BOSTON, MASS.:
THOMAS B. NOONAN & CO.
1893.

mar 13. 1897

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OPUSCULUM cui titulus, "*Why, How, When,*" etc., Auctore Rev. Pr. J. L. O' NEIL, O. P., majori qua potuimus sedulitate perlegimus et nihil in eo fidei vel moribus contrarium invenimus; proindeque dignum censemus ut typis mandetur.

L. F. KEARNEY, O. P. *L. S. T.*
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Revisores Ordinis.

* poor condition

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LOVINGLY AND GRATEFULLY DEDICATED

TO

My Mother,

AT WHOSE KNEE, I LEARNED, IN CHILDHOOD,

HOW TO READ.

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PREFACE.

CONSIDERING the force in our day of the Wise Man's utterance three thousand years ago, that "of making many books there is no end," and that "much study is an affliction of the flesh," [1] it demands some courage, especially for a neophyte, to enter the ranks of our modern writers.

I cannot agree with Emerson when he says that "every book is written with a constant secret reference to the few intelligent persons whom the writer believes to exist in a million." No, I prefer Carlyle's utterance, that "If a book come from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts;" and believing that there are many of good desire who may not be richly endowed with intellectual gifts, but who are ready to welcome help offered in a loving way, I send on its mission WHY,

[1] Ecclesiastes xii: 12.

WHEN, HOW, AND WHAT, with a priest's love for souls, and with a priest's hope that it may be of assistance to our people in their efforts for a higher intellectual and spiritual life.

I make no apology for this publication; books with apologies ought not to appear. Neither shall I go into anticipatory ecstasies in "the hope that even one soul will be benefited by it." We are told that St. Francis de Sales could preach eloquently, though only one person were present in the church; but I honestly doubt if even the gentle Bishop would have published a book if he thought that only one soul would profit by it.[2]

In Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature," there is a chapter on "Little Books," in the course of which he quotes from Francis Osborne "a ludicrous image" in favor of such books. "Huge volumes, like the ox roasted whole at Bartholomew fair, may proclaim plenty of labor, but afford less of what is *delicate*, *savory*, and *well-concocted*, than SMALLER PIECES." I trust that Modesty will not

[2] In this publication I hope for better results than fell to the lot of the Vicar of Wakefield, whose tracts on his pet subject, as he resignedly tells us, were not sold, though he had the consolation of thinking that they were read only by the chosen few.

be considered as having abdicated her rightful place, if Candor frankly avows the hope that this little book may share in Osborne's commendation of the *smaller pieces.*

"A great book is a great evil." This proverb from the Greek, Addison uses as a text for one of the spiciest of his essays.[3] Like Walpole, I prefer little books; and in this case it would be a gratification if I could apply to WHY, WHEN, HOW, AND WHAT, the anecdote recorded by him of the witty Frenchman who, when he was asked if he liked books in *folio*, replied that he preferred them in *fructu.*

Without loading the modest pages of this little book with detailed references, I have given that credit which honesty requires, to those authors from whose works I have drawn. I would not wish to deserve the reproach put upon those who,

> "Steal a thought,
> And clip it round the edge, and challenge him
> Whose 'twas to swear to it. To serve things thus
> Is as foul witches to cut up old moons
> Into new stars." [4]

[3] *The Spectator*, No. 124.

[4] Philip James Bailey. This honesty affords me also a comforting thought that Irving did not have such candid people in view when he wrote his essay, "The Art of Book Making."

I bear also in mind the advice of the "old literary sinner,"[5] who, by the way, was an abbé as well known for piety as for book-making, and therefore I look neither for fame nor profit;[6] but content myself with an earnest prayer that this little book may do much good, either by shedding additional light on a subject already well illustrated, or by reaching some readers to whom other works of greater merit may not be accessible.

St. Peter's Church, Memphis, Tenn.,
Feast of Pentecost, 1893.

[5] See "Curiosities of Literature."

[6] Despite Dr. Johnson's vigorous statement that only blockheads write without expectation of money, I prefer to follow the abbé's counsel.

INTRODUCTION.

JOHNSON'S answer to the question: "Who was the most miserable man?" that it was "he who could not read on a rainy day," seems pretty nearly right, if we may judge from the universality and immemorial antiquity of books of some kind. Wherever a spark of civilization has kindled any higher than mere physical wants, they are sure to show themselves in some form. It may be going too far back to admit the literal exactness of an advertisement, lately published in all our journals, of "Pre-Adamite Literature," or to accept Paul Ikster's catalogue of our first parents' library, or to receive the opinion of some Irish writers that there were public libraries in their island before the Flood, or of some others who gave Noah a nautical library in his ark; but still history and books dawn together. The gray twilight of the world saw the stylus active in the far East, writing sacred poems on thick, fleshy tropical leaves. Egypt lifts the curtain from her earliest

days to show us, at Thebes,[1] the Temple of Thoth, "the god of letters," with the divinity himself sitting throned over the gate, as the guardian genius of the literary wonders of the "Library" within; and Canaan had its Book City — Kiriath Sepher — and its Gebal or Byblos, as the Septuagint reads it, that is, "University Town." As to Assyria, tons of its clay chronicles lie in the British Museum. Asia Minor had its Pergamos; Greece and Rome need no mention; and Persia had its Median. Modern books outrun the forests now in their leaves, and but that the laws of mortality include them as well as their readers, would soon leave us no standing-room."

This extract which I take from an essay on reading, by Dr. Cunningham Geikie, I place beside Lord Bacon's terse saying that "reading maketh a full man;" and building on both, as a text, I would introduce my readers into the boundless domain of literature. At the very threshold it is necessary to understand that prudence enlightened by religion must guide our steps.

[1] Here, it is said, the first library of which we have any account was established by Rameses II., in honor of his father, Osymandias, 2000 B.C.

The first library to which the public was freely admitted was established by Pisistratus, Tyrant of Athens, about 500 B.C. This liberal work should lighten the weight of our judgment when we reflect on his many evil deeds.

I would not unduly emphasize the importance of this subject; I would not consciously exaggerate its influence, for I believe, with Aubrey de Vere, that "a temperate estimate of itself is not one of the characteristics of modern intellect," and that, therefore, its tendency to excess should rather be checked; but truth proclaims that as a theme literature has inspired many a noble pen, while as a reality it is as broad as our humanity, as lasting as the ages, and as high as the highest flights of human genius.

In stating even thus strongly this great fact, I endeavor to keep that middle place where virtue stands. With Professor Maurice Francis Egan, I readily admit that there are two extremes from which literature is regarded in these days. From one point of view it is looked on as the only thing in life worth living for; from the other, as a mere ornament, a distraction, an amusement for an idle hour. The adherents of the former vicious notion have organized a hollow culture which substitutes literature for God — a fetichism not as substantial as the paganism of the ancients. This modern idolatry proclaims the high priesthood of Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, and reserves honored niches for George Eliot, George Sand, and other less conspicuous followers of the new cult. With them literature is above faith. The supernatural

they would remove from their consideration. Like many modern politicians and statesmen, they would put Christ out of His own world, and blasphemously offer to misguided men, in place of the Word, the Way, and the Light, their own vapid utterances and their own crooked ways that begin and end in darkness. Religion's consolations, they tell us, may fail; but those of literature will endure. This false worship, this lifting up of a new idol, is nothing more than veiled paganism, a culture, for their own sake, of poetry, of beautiful thought beautifully chiselled, of exquisite sentiment couched in polished phrase. It leads from God; and therefore its teaching is without value, and its guidance that of the blind. In this view we may admire the moderation of Aubrey de Vere's remark, "that we should have no reason to be surprised if we found that, high as are the services and just honors of literature, there is, among many, a disposition to exaggerate both."

"There are some who fancy that no genuine moral influence survives except that which proceeds from the author's desk. The 'Slave of the Lamp' is the divinity in whom they believe. Such an exaggerated estimate of literary power proceeds, of course, mainly from an inadequate estimate of other things, and especially of revealed religion. To depreciate religion in order to

exalt literature is to remove the buttresses, and tamper with the foundations of a building, in the hope of raising higher, with the materials thus provided, its pinnacles and towers."

Favoring the other extreme view of literature, of which Professor Egan speaks, we find that numerous class to whom letters are without higher purpose than ornament or amusement, as whim or fancy may dictate, who bolt and swallow indiscriminately the nondescript and often corrupt publications of a disorderly, unrestricted press, without serious thought of motive or effect, with only desire to pass time, and mayhap to make a silly record of the number of trashy volumes read in a given time. This is sad. It is a great crime, in which the young are the greater victims, the old the greater sinners. The question of imperfect, unfinished, neglected education here arises; and of many it may be said that their perfunctory school days having passed, in which they learned merely how to read, as the letters and words demand, but without developing a taste for solid reading or a love for good books, the crude work of the class-room is taken up by the newspapers and the flat, shallow novels, and by them brought to a very unhappy close.

It is not my purpose to enlarge upon either of these extreme views of literature. I would merely

make a just estimate of a factor in civilization that wise men have valued highly, and I would try to indicate the worth and excellence of a noble art whose influence ranges far beyond the painter's rarest dream, the sculptor's sublimest ideal, the composer's sweetest song. Not as a panacea for humanity's ills would I offer literature, but surely as a great element in elevating, refining, and reforming man. When I say with Dr. Johnson that by reading must the foundation of knowledge be laid, I do not speak of a mere acquaintance with books; for it is one thing to know about books, and it is another thing to know the books themselves. "To know one good book well is better than to know something about one hundred good books at second hand."[2] "It must not be thought that books alone make a man, or that merely to know them is education. . . . Mere words and facts, dead and disjointed, leave a man empty and unfinished as to all true education."[3] I speak rather of the delightful cultivation of the mind, and the beautiful training of the heart, which come from the diligent study of well-chosen books. I mean delving for what Sir William Davenant called the

> "Gold of the dead,
> Which time does still disperse, but not devour."

[2] Charles F. Richardson. [3] Geikie.

I mean what Lacordaire says is the characteristic of every remarkable man, a fondness for the literary masterpieces that form the taste, and keep the soul in elevated regions by preventing it from sinking down into the vulgarity of mere material and gentlemanly occupations. I mean the reading which furnishes the mind with materials of knowledge, and begets the thinking that makes what we read our own. I speak of the study of true literature, which, in the training and discipline of the mind is, perhaps, the best medium for mental culture, which contains the sublimest thoughts of man, the most logical arguments, the refined beauties of the imagination, and true moral teaching; which is humanizing in the best sense of the word; which cultivates reason, judgment, imagination, the will, the heart.[4]

When Carlyle wrote that the university of today is a collection of books, he did not mean to encourage indiscriminate reading, nor yet did he have any sympathy with Beaconsfield's declaration in "Lothaire" that books are the curse of the human race, and that the greatest misfortune that ever befell man was the art of printing. He came nearer to the truth when he said, with greater moderation, that nine-tenths of the books published

[4] John O'Kane Murray.

are nonsense, of which the other one-tenth is the refutation. Lacordaire expressed a similar thought when he wrote that "the pagans themselves, such as Plato, Plutarch, Cicero, and many others, are preferable a thousand times over to the great mass of our modern writers." Emerson[5] said, and said wisely, that books well used are among the best things; abused, among the worst; as Whipple said, no less wisely, that good books are the most precious of blessings to a people; bad books are among the worst of curses.

Though recognizing with Addison that books are the legacies of genius to generations unborn, I would follow Carlyle, and divide them, like men into sheep and goats, and with Ruskin into books of the hour and books of all time. With the latter I maintain that "no book is worth anything which is not worth much; nor is it serviceable until it has been read and re-read, and loved and loved again; marked so that you can refer to the passage you want in it, as a soldier can seize the weapon he needs in an armory."

[5] Though I shall quote Emerson from time to time, I do not lose sight of his irreverent spirit that would put our Lord with the foundress of the Shakers or with Swedenborg. Emerson's religion was of the earth, bounded by time, and rose no higher than man. His literary standing calls for other measures.

I do not speak, therefore, of literature unadvisedly or indiscriminately; nor would I dislodge the remotest of religion's outposts as they stand sentry in the bivouac of our human lives. Christianity rightly understood and honestly practised is the only absolute solution of social problems, and in proportion to its influence over literature does this become an element for good in shaping the hearts of men. "In seeking to subject literature to the empire of religion," to quote Dr. Brownson, "we are far from seeking to deprive it of any of its powers, its variety, extent, delicacy, or grace. We are seeking to provide for these in a higher degree, to give to literature itself a higher order of excellence." Where the light and warmth of Christ's teaching are wanting, literature becomes pagan. Beautiful it may be in design, classic in finish; but it is none the less dead, as the marble into which the artist, however skilful, can breathe no quickening breath of life. Such literature I do not commend except as its graceful form, its style, may make it an aid to mere artistic culture. As a remedy for the evils of our material, rapid, rushing, whirling, dizzy age, in which there is crying need, in every walk of life, for solid men, men of mental brawn and spiritual muscle, men aspiring to a region beyond the bustle and clamor of this gross world, a pagan literature cannot avail.

Religion alone can make such men, and in this literature should be her handmaid.[6]

A world of thought is opened to us by the bare suggestion of our subject; and one pauses, as on the threshold of a temple, in expectation of splendid treasures within. I confess to a liking that time has developed into a fondness for this study, and many times have I offered my devout homage before that altar which literature may claim as its own. Many a spirit pilgrimage I have made, wandering, as it were, through vaulted aisles and corridors dim, that were yet illumined by a serene and often holy light; for is not the spark of genius an emanation from the Divine Spirit? and have not many pens, like the lips of Isaias, been touched with a purifying fire? Into these pleasant

[6] It is perhaps more necessary to-day than it was in Lord Bacon's time, that we have "full men." We have "ready men," though often one might wish that they were not so ready, for their conversation is without point or wit or merit, beyond a weight of words. We have some "exact men," not exactly the men whom Bacon said writing would make, but precise men, narrow men, straight-line men, — men whose actions are yard-sticked, and whose conduct is tape-measured, — but from such we pray to be delivered. We need strong men, whose dish is not dainty, who have, with hearty appetite and yet discriminating taste, partaken freely of the good things spread before them by the intellectual caterers of every age. We are cursed with a number of mental consumptives, spiritual cripples whose food has not been even the clean husk, but the very refuse of insipidity, sensationalism, stale wit, poverty-stricken ideas, baldness of thought more baldly expressed, — a mass of rubbish and garbage.

and sacred places I would gladly lead my readers; but the scope of this work allows me to do no more than ascend, like Moses, Nebo's Mount, and from its summit point to the promised land beyond. Earnestly do I desire the sympathy of my readers, not for sympathy's sake, but that in harmony of spirit we may gaze on a beautiful prospect. So deeply do I love this gracious mistress, literature, that were not the dignity of the priesthood my happy and exalted lot, eagerly would I seek a place among her devoted ministers, not for what literature is, but for the religion and truth I thus could serve. And doing this, I would wish to be true to Brownson's beautiful and noble thought that "the motive that scholars sometimes entertain, that their scholarship is a personal immunity, a sort of personal luxury, which they have a right to indulge for themselves alone, and that this is wherefore in God's providence they have been blessed with the capacity and means to be scholars, is false, mischievous. . . . The scholarship that rests with the scholar, that seeks only the scholar's own ease, pleasure, convenience, or renown, is worthy only of the unmitigated contempt of all men."

I shall be exceedingly glad, and rewarded plentifully, if my words will the more firmly convince those who read this little book that they ought to be constant in paying court at literature's shrine,

following only the paths that lead aright, and animated with the high resolve that their offerings shall be only the choicest.

By such a cultivation of letters the development of the religious life will be powerfully stimulated; and this will in turn react on letters, for they are a natural foundation for the supernatural superstructure, and the supernatural does not impair, but improves and perfects the natural. Indeed, reason points to the inference, and experience to the fact, of the ebb of the tide of religion being synchronous with the ebb of the tide of science and letters, in the history of Christendom.[7]

[7] Rev. F. Edward, C.P.: "Literature as a Factor in Human Happiness or Perfection."

WHY WE OUGHT TO READ.

WHY WE OUGHT TO READ.

THE question why we ought to read is fundamental, natural. We ourselves are its answer, and if we desire to put into words the feelings that spring from our being, we may repeat the cry of David when, in the rapture of his admiration for man, he exclaimed, "Thou hast made him, O God, a little less than the angels." From this dignity of man, from his spirituality, from his soul stamped with the divine likeness, with its rich endowment of will, memory, and understanding, and its most rich supernatural gifts of faith, hope, and charity, must we seek the full answer to our question. A law of our being commands us to seek for spiritual culture and intellectual nourishment, and this law is largely satisfied by reading and meditation.

Man's existence on earth depends on food; we eat to live. But the Divine Master knew the higher needs of our life when He said that not by bread alone could we be sustained. The proper develop-

ment, as well as the support of man, requires not only the daily bread of the body, but also that other bread which is spiritual, and which, like the manna that fell from heaven, will satisfy many cravings of our nature. To read, therefore, to yield to the just demands of our spiritual and intellectual appetite, is assuredly as pressing a duty as that which commands us to sustain our drooping physical energies, and to ward off, as long as possible, the telling effects of the wear and tear of toil upon our wearied bodies.

But further than this we must go. While standing for the claims of our inferior part, we must, as Christians, as reasonable creatures, admit the higher claims of our minds, our souls, our undying and imperishable part. It is a great crime to destroy the life of our body, either positively by violence, or negatively by refusing to it its just support. In either case we usurp the sovereign rights of the Author of life. But as mind is above matter, as the immortal spirit transcends the perishing clay, so is there a more heinous sin in wounding our being's nobler part, in deliberately extinguishing the light of the Holy Ghost, or in failing to keep alive the divine spark ignited by the Creator. To read, to improve our minds by observation, conversation, meditation, and experience; to train intelligently our moral nature; to know ourselves; to

put ourselves in an intellectual communion with the beauties of creation and with the divine beauty of the Creator; to be intellectually alive to some of the treasures with which human genius has enriched the world, are surely higher duties than to pass one's years in a mere effort to consume and to wear. We should read, therefore, because we are little less than the angels; because we are so gloriously dowered by the munificent Father who is in Heaven; because we are not of this world only, nor for this world only; because we possess immortal souls touched by the finger of God, and kindled by the fire of the Holy Ghost.

Reading, especially when it runs in spiritual channels, while it is important even inside of the walls of the convent, is absolutely necessary to men and women in the world, who have neither rule, nor cloister, nor superior, but who desire to feed and nourish prayer, to plant the wilderness, and to irrigate what they have planted. Such a taste must be cultivated; though Faber says that it is more than a taste, that it is a grace, and that one who possesses it has a much greater chance of advancing and persevering than one who does not possess it.

For many, the thought or meditation that accompanies reading is the only thinking or meditating in which they can engage; and, therefore, the habit

of reading must be of great assistance to them, in making a good use of free time, and in giving a real value to spare moments that by some are habitually squandered. When time hangs heavy, the wings of the spirit flap painfully and slow. Then it is that a book is a strong tower, nay a very church, with angels lurking among the leaves, as if these were so many niches. The book becomes a guard. It takes possession of the mind for which the evil one is always on the watch. It occupies it; garrisons it. It peoples it with thoughts which are directly or indirectly of God.[1]

"Lo, here a little volume, but great book!
It is, in one choice handful, Heaven and all
Heaven's royal host, encamped thus small
To prove that true schools use to tell,
A thousand angels in one point can dwell.

"It is an armory of light;
Let constant use but keep it bright,
You'll find it yields,
To holy hands and humble hearts,
More swords and shields,
Than sin hath snares, or hell hath darts."[2]

Another suggestive thought of Father Faber is that it is very hard for a person who does not like reading, to talk without sinning. As a help to

[1] Father Faber. [2] Rev. Richard Crashaw.

the government of the tongue, a taste for reading is invaluable. In a general way it will make piety more attractive, because more intelligent. "Ignorance is repulsive," he says, "but I doubt if it is so repulsive as that half-ignorant narrowness of mind which characterizes persons who do not read."

Good books rouse us to courageous action and stimulate the weak to noble deeds. "Heroic arms of old cut down the Pelian pines, and dragged the oar all night long through the foam of an unknown sea. Is this more a lesson of courage and perseverance to the Arctic discoverer than to the village boy who finds a brave resolution checked by a trivial obstacle? Men read these things, and their physical aspect itself, mien, and step, are altered. A breath from far summits sends strength into their souls. Experience not their own is imparted to them; the heart is made more single, but the mind is made many-sided, and the faculties of the individual are multiplied into those of his kind."[3]

"They awaken our sleeping powers; excite the fancy; develop reflection; we are able to use our faculties as the trained runner his limbs, reaching on, fresh and vigorous, where others are blown and fall behind. . . . Our troubles lose their name before the majestic repose of books, whose immortal peace silently hushes our fretting. Our envies,

[3] Aubrey de Vere.

jealousies, mean ambitions, petty rancors, strifes, and exaggerations, gnaw and consume us, but they know nothing of them, and stand lovingly side by side, their hates, and heart-burnings, and eruptions, forgotten forever."[4] We can recognize, in this, the truth of Aubrey de Vere's conclusion that "the enlarging influence of an imagination developed by the higher class of literature does for the intellect of man something analogous to that which a holier power does for him at the depths of his being. It creates a communion of intelligences; it abolishes isolation; it bestows on each what belongs to all; it cannot, therefore, but abate prejudice, break through narrowness, destroy littleness." Of this development, the beautiful fruit is magnanimity, on which, hear again Aubrey de Vere: "One who ranges among the great men of all ages, and recognizes that far-reaching influence by which, silently, unostentatiously, and grasping at no power, they have built up the empire of thought, is less likely than another to join in the stress and strain of petty emulations. He does not need the lordship over a narrow circle. To him there are sceptres not made of iron or gold, and spiritual thrones, to rest at the foot of which is better than vulgar rule. The remoter power, he knows, is the more permanent. The senate amid

[4] Geikie.

which he may, if he deserves it, sit as an assessor, includes all the great men who have ever lived; yet within it there is no clamor, and no pressure at the gate."

Father Faber is right therefore, when he declares that we become better missionaries in daily society if we have a taste for solid reading;[5] that we rise above the little-minded, short-sighted people who have no relish for study, and who are only fractions of true men or of true women; that this taste for reading will call out our manhood or womanhood; that it will make us serious; that it will infuse an element of greatness into everything about us, aiding us wonderfully in the supernatural task of gaining inward peace. The light coming from this will not only illuminate our own work, it will enlarge our charity in judging of the work of others. Through it our sphere of vision will be increased, our horizon widened. We shall free ourselves from little jealousies, from uncharitable doubts, from unworthy suspicions, from unsympathetic cautions, from ungenerous delays, from narrow

[5] In this connection I would remind you of the cheer of a book to the sick; of the charity we exercise in reading to them; of the many opportunities presented to us of supplying the poor, patients in hospitals and prisoners in jails, with good reading. It is an excellent custom, practised by many, to send to such institutions the journals and magazines that they do not intend to preserve, as well as such other reading in book form as their means permit.

criticisms, from conceited pedantries, from shallow pomposities about others, and their good works, things which are the especial disease of little great and little good men, and which may be said to frustrate one-third, if not more, of all the good works which are attempted in the Church. I admire this doctrine of Faber, and few priests there are who have not found in their experience the further truth of his remark that "goodness that is not greatness is a sad misfortune. While it saves its own soul it will not let others save theirs. Especially does it contrive, in proportion to its influence, to put a spoke in the wheel of all progress; and it has almost a talent for interfering with efforts for the salvation of souls."

From such disasters a taste for reading delivers us. "How many a narrow mind has it not made broad! How many close, stifling, unwindowed hearts has it not filled with mountain air, and sunshine, and widened them to noble, spacious halls, so making room for God where He had no room before."[6] How many have been heightened in spiritual stature, and so elevated above this material world, that they could listen uninterruptedly to the voice of the Spirit of God! Such examples among the saints are familiar. I need not recall them; I only urge their imitation.

[6] Faber.

Lord Bacon who, though Pope called him the meanest of mankind, was also, according to the same author, the wisest and the brightest, makes some excellent suggestions that may here find place. He would have us read, as wise men read, to use the studies which crafty men condemn, and simple men admire; and he reminds us that we should engage in reading for delight and ornament as well as for ability, while he warns us not to read for the purpose of contradicting or refuting, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider. "In the delicate irony of this last advice we discern the satisfaction of the philosopher in having deprived the mass of mankind of the only motives which prompt them to read at all."[7]

The Vicar of Wakefield, in his own philosophic way, gives a strong motive for reading: "If," he declares, "we may say that books will not bring us to enjoy life, they will at least teach us to endure it." A very proper motive, beyond doubt. Herein we find a suggestion of remedy for life's miseries, such as was set before the ancient Thebans, at the head of their library door — "Medicine for the soul." The monks christianized this, and so realized it in a higher way. And Burton, in his "Anatomy of Melancholy," quotes Heinsius, who quaintly and beautifully says: "I no sooner come into the

[7] Agnes Repplier.

library but I bolt the door to me, excluding lust, avarice, and all such vices whose nurse is idleness, the mother of ignorance and melancholy herself; and in the very lap of eternity among so many divine souls, I take my seat with so lofty a spirit and sweet content that I pity all our great ones and rich men who know not this happiness." [8]

Addison expressed a similar thought when he wrote: "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. As by the one health is preserved, strengthened, and invigorated, by the other, virtue, which is the health of the mind, is kept alive, cherished, and confirmed."

Furthermore, we should read because of that delightful companionship with the great and spiritual who, though dead, live through all time.

"My days among the dead are past;
Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old;
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse night and day." [9]

[8] Dr. Johnson was accustomed to say that Burton's "Anatomy" was the only book that could make him rise two hours before his usual time. It contains much curious matter, among which several interesting quotations on books are given.

[9] Southey.

"With awe around these silent walks I tread;
These are the lasting mansions of the dead:
'The dead!' methinks a thousand tongues reply;
'These are the tombs of such as cannot die!'
Crowned with eternal fame, they sit sublime,
And laugh at all the little strife of time." [10]

"How pleasant," says that true lover of books, Leigh Hunt, "to reflect that the greatest lovers of books have themselves become books! Consider: mines themselves are exhausted; cities perish; kingdoms are swept away, and man weeps with indignation to think that his own body is not immortal; — yet this little body of thought that lies before me in the shape of a book has existed thousands of years; nor, since the invention of the press, can anything short of a universal convulsion of nature abolish it." "Books do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a phial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. A good book is the precious life blood of the master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond life." [11] "All that men have proposed, discovered, done, felt, or imagined, so far as it still survives, does so in books, as distant horizons are refracted, at times, on the vapor of the air. King-

[10] Crabbe. [11] Milton.

doms and empires have shrunk into so many alphabetic characters; their kings and mighty men, with all their affairs, wars, triumphs, national calamities, their cities and broad territories, are shrunk into so many printed words, in so far as they still live." [12]

"In books lies the soul of the whole past time; the articulate audible voice of the past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. . . . All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books. They are the chosen possession of men." [13]

"Books are the true metempsychosis and transmigration of souls, by which the illustrious dead pass up and down among men forever. Indeed, they are all that remains of the past; except what museums have of stray flotsam and jetsam from the great wreck; waifs cast ashore from the abyss in which all else has gone down." [14]

"When all that is worldly," wrote Washington Irving, "turns to dross around us, books only retain their steady value. When friends grow cold, and the converse of intimates languishes into vapid civility and commonplace, these only continue the

[12] Geikie.

[13] Carlyle, whose "Heroes and Hero Worship" and "Sartor Resartus" furnish many fine passages in praise of books.

[14] Geikie.

unaltered countenance of happier days, and cheer us with that true friendship which never deceived hope nor deserted sorrow."

"And so, were a wholesome book as rare as an honest friend,
To choose the book be mine: the friend let another take.
For altered looks and jealousies and fears have none entrance here;
The silent volume listeneth well, and speaketh when thou listest:
It praiseth thy good without envy, it chideth thine evil without malice;
It is to thee thy waiting slave, and thine unbending teacher
Need to humor no caprice, nor to bear with no infirmity;
Thy sin, thy slander or neglect chilleth not, quencheth not its love:
Unalterably speaketh it the truth, warped not by error nor interest,
For a good book is the best of friends, the same to-day and forever." [15]

"To fall in love with a good book is one of the greatest events that can befall us. It is to have a new influence pouring itself into our life, a new teacher to inspire and refine us, a new friend to be by our side always, who, when life grows narrow and weary, will take us into his wider, and calmer, and higher world. Whether it be biography, introducing us to some humble life made great by duty done; or history, opening vistas into the movements and destinies of nations that have

[15] Tupper.

passed away; or poetry, making music of all the common things around us, and filling the fields and the skies, and the work of the city and the cottage, with eternal meanings, — whether it be these, or story books, or religious books, or science; no one can become the friend even of one good book without being made wiser and better. Do not think I am going to recommend any such book to you. The beauty of a friend is that we discover him." [16]

Precious is the endowment of the friendship thus offered to us, rich is the opportunity of such communion, rare are the joys of mind and heart to which we are admitted, as in a Valhalla where urn, and bust, and chiselled marble glow and speak in spirit voices, louder and clearer than tongues of flesh. I am not alone in saying that literature like nobility runs in the blood. Hazlitt and Father Faber both declare this as a truth. Nevertheless, into these spiritual abodes all may enter who will. At all times may consultation be held with these choice spirits, for as Cicero puts it, they are ever disengaged. "They are the masters who instruct us without rods and ferules, without hard words and anger, without clothes or money. If you approach them, they are not asleep; if investigating, you interrogate them, they conceal nothing; if you

[16] Henry Drummond.

mistake them, they never grumble; if you are ignorant, they cannot laugh at you." [17] Like true and old friends, "they are the same in wealth and poverty, in glory and obscurity. With them there is no rivalry, for in the dead there is no change. Plato is never sullen; Cervantes is never petulant; Demosthenes never comes unseasonably; Dante never stays too long; no difference of opinion can alienate Cicero; no heresy can excite the horror of Bossuet." [18] These councillors, according to Dr. Johnson, are most instructive because they are heard with patience and reverence. "It is easy to gain access to them, for they are always at our service; we may admit them to our company and dismiss them whenever we please. In return for all their services, they only ask us to accommodate them with a convenient chamber in some corner of our habitation." [19]

> "O precious evenings! all too swiftly sped!
> Leaving us heirs to amplest heritages
> Of all the best thoughts of the greatest sages,
> And giving tongues unto the silent dead."

[17] Richard de Bury, Chancellor of England under Edward III., whose library, according to Hallam, was probably the first that any private man had ever formed.

[18] Macaulay.

[19] Petrarch, who proved his love for books by the care with which he sought out manuscripts, and labored for the preservation of the Latin authors, and for the publication of intelligible texts of some of these classics.

This fine thought of Longfellow was shared by other great men; and when Carlyle said, "Of all the things which man can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful, and worthy are the things we call books;" and when Fénelon wrote, "If the crowns of all the kingdoms of earth were laid at my feet in exchange for books and my love of reading, I would spurn them all," they expressed a fitting appreciation of the royal and glorious treasures that literature offers to man. "No wonder Cicero said that he would part with all he was worth, so he might but live and die among his books. No wonder Petrarch was among them to the last, and was found dead in their company. It seems natural that the venerable Bede should have died dictating, and that Leibnitz should have died with a book in his hand, and Lord Clarendon at his desk. Buckle's last words, 'My poor books' tell of a passion strong in death; and it seemed only a fitting farewell, when the tears stole down the manly cheek of Scott as they wheeled him into his library, when he had come back to Abbotsford to die. Southey, white-haired, a living shadow, sitting stroking and kissing the books he could no longer open or read, is altogether pathetic."[20] St. Jerome tells us that Plato died writing; and of Bayard Taylor, Longfellow sings:

[20] Geikie.

"Dead he lay among his books!
The peace of God was in his looks."

The poorest may, therefore, become the richest; the humblest may sit in state; the lowliest may take to themselves Beaumont and Fletcher's fine lines: —

"That place that does contain my books,
The best companions, is to me,
A glorious court where hourly I converse with the old sages and philosophers;
And sometimes, for variety I confer with kings and emperors, and weigh their counsels."

While noting the eagerness of people for a glance at a poet, a question to a man of science, a word with a statesman, the opportunity to throw a flower before princely feet, or to catch a kindly glance from queenly eyes, Ruskin deplores the indifference of many to the "kings and statesmen lingering patiently in those plainly furnished and narrow ante-rooms, our bookcases, waiting, not to grant an audience, but to gain it."

We can here readily understand the enthusiasm of Wordsworth, when he wrote: —

"Yet is it just
That here in memory of all books which lay
Their sure foundation in the heart of man,
Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,
That in the name of all inspired souls —

From Homer, the great Thunderer, from the voice
That roars along the bed of Jewish song,
And that more varied and elaborate,
Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake
Our shores in England, — from those loftiest notes
Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made
For cottagers and spinners at the wheel,
And sunburnt travellers resting their tired limbs,
Stretched under wayside hedge rows, ballad tunes,
Food for the hungry ears of little ones,
And for old men who have survived their joys —
'Tis just that in behalf of these, the works,
And of the men that framed them, whether known
Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves,
That I would here assert their rights, attest
Their honors, and should, once for all, pronounce
Their benediction ; speak of them as Powers
Forever to be hallowed."

"You get into society, in the widest sense, in a great library, with the huge advantage of needing no introductions, and not dreading repulses. From that great crowd you can choose what companions you please, for in these silent levees of the immortals, there is no pride, but the highest is at the service of the lowest, with a grand humility."[21]

"You may talk to kings and queens, while this eternal court is open to you, with its society wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen, the mighty, of every place and time. Into that

[21] Geikie.

you may enter always; in that you may take fellowship and rank according to your wish; from that, once entered into, you can never be outcast but by your own fault."[22]

How singularly privileged we are! To hear wise men we need not travel, as Plato did, to Egypt; as Pythagoras, to Italy; or as Apollonius, to India. The treasures of the world and of all time are at our doors.

"God be thanked, therefore, for books. They are the voices of the distant and the dead, and make us heirs of the spiritual life of past ages. Books are the true levellers; they give to us who will faithfully use them the society, the spiritual presence, of the best and greatest of our race. No matter how poor I am, no matter though the prosperous of my own time will not enter my obscure dwelling, if the sacred writers will enter and take up their abode under my roof; if Milton will cross my threshold to sing to me of Paradise; and Shakespeare to open to me the worlds of imagination and the workings of the human heart; and Franklin to enrich me with his practical wisdom; I shall not pine for want of intellectual companionship, and I may become a cultivated man, thought excluded from what is called the best society in the place where I live." This thought of William

[22] Ruskin.

Ellery Channing reminds me of what Jeremy Collier said in a like strain: "Books support us under solitude, and keep us from being a burden to ourselves. They help us to forget the crossness of men and things, compose our cares and our passions, and lay our disappointments asleep. When we are weary of the living we may repair to the dead, who have nothing of peevishness, pride, or design in their conversation." Readily then may we acknowledge the force of Crabbe's lines that books —

> "Give
> New views to life and teach us how to live;
> They soothe the grieved, the stubborn they chastise,
> Fools they admonish, and confirm the wise;
> Their aid they yield to all; they never shun
> The man of sorrows or the wretch undone:
> Unlike the hard, the selfish and the proud,
> They fly not sullen from the suppliant crowd;
> Nor tell to various people various things,
> But show to subjects what they show to kings."

Books, especially those connected with history, instruct the great when no one but flatterers can approach them. Books instruct and wound not. Therefore Don Alphonzo, king of Arragon, being once asked who were the best counsellors, replied, "The dead [meaning books], because we learn easily from them what we wish to know." [23]

[23] The Ages of Faith.

Richest and happiest, therefore, is the man who loves and possesses good books. Their splendid opportunities, of which we may all avail ourselves, are the birthright of every man.

Poor, then, is he who, though possessing all else of material things, fails to secure his rightful inheritance of the writings of immortal men whose quickening spirits breathe and pulsate in their works, long years after their dust has mingled with its mother earth. All readers of Dickens may remember in "Our Mutual Friend," the Golden Dustman whose fortune did not satisfy him, but rather made him more eager to gratify his longing "for some bold reading," some splendid book or what he called "a gorging wolume." He therefore engaged that genial gentleman and master of the ballad, Mr. Silas Wegg, of the wooden leg, to whom "all print was open," and who generously agreed, for two pence ha' penny an hour, to introduce Mr. Boffin into the delights of the world of letters. The good man felt, in his simple way, what men of wider opportunities recognize more clearly, that books are the friends that never desert us, and whose pleasures never drag. Douglas Jerrold had no better thought than Mr. Boffin's, but a finer expression, when he spoke of a good book as the unfailing Damon to his loving Pythias; and Leigh Hunt presents a touching picture as he

plaintively sighs for such a return of fortune that he might once again lay his beating temples on his loved books, and die.

Here I cannot resist the desire to lay before my readers a sonnet written by Longfellow a short time before his death. In his own words, books had "a sweet serenity," which in the sunset of his life made his parting from them still more painful.

> "Sadly as some old mediæval knight
> Gazed at the arms he could no longer wield,
> The sword two-handed and the shining shield
> Suspended in the hall, and full in sight,
> While secret longings for the lost delight
> Of tourney or adventure in the field
> Came over him, and tears but half concealed
> Trembled and fell upon his beard of white,
> So I behold these books upon their shelf,
> My ornaments and arms of other days;
> Not wholly useless, though no longer used,
> For they remind me of my other self,
> Younger and stronger, and the pleasant ways
> In which I walked, now clouded and confused."

In the same strain, Roscoe, the historian of the Medici, expressed the only regret he felt when financial calamity befell him and obliged him to sell his beloved books: —

> "As one, who, destined from his friends to part,
> Regrets his loss, but hopes again erewhile
> To share their converse, and enjoy their smile,
> And tempers, as he may, affliction's dart;

Thus, loved associates, chiefs of elder art,
Teachers of wisdom, who could once beguile
My tedious hours, and lighten every toil,
I now resign you; nor with fainting heart;
For pass a few short years, or days, or hours,
And happier seasons may their dawn unfold,
And all your sacred fellowship restore;
When freed from earth, unlimited its powers,
Mind shall with mind direct communion hold,
And kindred spirits meet to part no more."

Gladly then, I would say, may we unite with Crabbe in his devout thanksgiving to God for the gift of books: —

"Blest be the gracious Power who taught mankind
To stamp a lasting image of the mind."

Yet, of many who spend much time in reading, it may be said that they do not realize that this exercise is a duty, though it may also be a most refreshing entertainment. The idea of "mind building," "soul culture," development of the spiritual, does not always dominate the reading even of those people who are quite bookish, who know many authors, and who have devoured many volumes. Pope knew these folk well, as we know from his lines: —

"The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head."

Young's thought is finer, and even more worthy of remembrance: —

> "How empty learning, and how vain is art,
> But as it mends the life and guides the heart." [24]

"We do not want mere readers," said Sydney Smith; "for the number of readers seems to be very much upon the increase, and mere readers are often the most idle of human beings." The fifty years that have elapsed since Sydney's death have added many to the ranks of "mere readers." Nevertheless, as James Russell Lowell puts it, the mere ability to read is a great thing. He declared it to be the key which admits us to the whole world of thought, and fancy, and imagination; to the

[24] On this point, read the forty-third chapter of the third book of "The Following of Christ." For this doctrine I would also refer to many passages in the Book of Proverbs; Isaias xxiv, 15; the Psalms, notably the cxviii; and St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the 14th chapter. We should avoid imitating the Athenians (Acts of the Apostles xvii, 21); and we should remember St. Bernard's wise words: "Some wish to learn merely that they may know, and this is curiosity; some, that they may be known, and this is vanity; and some, that they may become rich, and this is avarice." I think that Bacon must have had St. Bernard in mind when he wrote: "To spend too much time in studies, is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of a scholar." Blessed Humbert relates an interesting anecdote: A certain abbot asked a doctor of Paris: "Master, which is better for a man — that he do the good he already knows, or that he learn the good which he does not know?" "Better," answered the doctor, "that he should do the good he knows." "Why, then," replied the abbot, "do you doctors who know so much good and do so little, still continue to spend your time in vain studies?"

company of saint and sage, of the wisest and the wittiest, at their wisest and wittiest moment, enabling us to see with the keenest eyes, hear with the finest ears, and listen to the sweetest voices of all times.

Let me, however, impress it upon your minds, that the great, the fundamental, the natural reason why we ought to read, springs from our being, and seeks our perfection; tends to God, and seeks his glory.

"The wings of the soul are thought and the expression of thought; in other words, science and literature. These are the pinions man must put on if he would reach that elevation of his nature which may be termed human perfection, and enjoy those pure and lasting pleasures of his soul's faculties which may be denominated true human enjoyment and happiness." [25]

Cowper well expresses this truth: -

> "'Tis plain, the creature whom he chose to invest
> With kingship and dominion o'er the rest,
> Received his nobler nature and was made
> Fit for the power in which he stands arrayed,
> That first or last, hereafter, if not here,
> He too might make his Author's wisdom clear."

[25] Rev. F. Edward, C. P.

WHEN WE OUGHT TO READ.

WHEN WE OUGHT TO READ.

THE question: When we ought to read? is relative; the answer must vary with circumstances. Here only general suggestions are available; precise directions fall to the lot of the teacher. Some ought to read more than others. By many the value of time is seldom considered; others know how to use what are called spare moments. I think with pleasure of dear old Alban Butler, the author of the "Lives of the Saints," astride his easy-going horse, a book under each arm, and another diligently perused; and of Gladstone, of whom it is said that he is ever ready with some book, advantageously to fill any gaps that interrupted duties may leave in his busy days. St. Jerome advised Eustochium to read till sleep would overcome her, so that the sacred page might receive her reclining head. And in the Acts of the Apostles,[1] we find an example of time well

[1] Chapter viii.

employed, in the case of the eunuch who read while he was driven in his chariot. The reward of this diligence was his baptism by Philip. It is not expected that many will follow these illustrious examples, and it is quite as certain that the vast majority of men will continue to waste time and to deprive themselves of constantly recurring opportunities for mental and spiritual culture. However, we may give a more definite answer to our question; and speaking in a broad sense, we may say of reading what our Blessed Master said of prayer, that we should always read and never grow faint. A literal interpretation of this saying would be absurd; it is the spirit we must catch. As prayer is constantly maintained, not by formal exercises, but by the uprightness and devotion of one's heart in dedicating all to God, so we may read always, not in mere printed books, but by studying intelligently ourselves, nature (St. Bernard's great book), the life around us, men, happenings, the world, the warp and woof that are ever in the shuttle of time, weaving our varied experiences.[2]

But beyond this, every man and woman should

[2] A certain philosopher once asked St. Antony how he managed to live without books. "My books," answered the saint, "are all creatures; some are ever at my hand; I read them when I will."

scrupulously devote some time to book reading every day. Daily we ask for the bread of the soul and that of the body; daily too should we nourish our minds. He who refuses to do this cannot long maintain an active intelligence. Such a man's observation (if he has any) will be without point or profit. He will not know himself, though this is his proper study. The lessons of experience will be lost on him; he will never fully develop. Stunted and dwarfed, he will be a failure among men, and a disappointment to God.

The examples are numerous of men in the intervals of their work, and of women during leisure moments left by household cares, who attained a considerable degree of culture by diligently employing these spare hours in reading. It is also a good method, where practicable, to have some one read to you while you may be otherwise employed. Do not read when you are fatigued, except the reading be light and refreshing. An attempt at serious study, when we are physically and mentally exhausted, brings no benefit, but rather occasions a dislike that may degenerate into disgust. This would be a serious hindrance at other and more favorable times. St. Thomas directs us to leave prayer when nature grows weary. I think the rule is applicable to reading. Do not be deterred, at odd moments from snatching a glance at a good

book, through fear that you will never be able to attain proficiency. Such a method is not recommended as a rule; but as an opportunity for those whose leisure hours are few, I would strongly advise them to seize and employ every advantage of this kind. Do not calculate the result; it will be gradual, but effectual. Worry not for the "sum total." Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Use the time that is at hand.

I shall make no attempt to fix rules. Value time; cultivate a taste for good reading; realize your special needs, and you will not require a teacher to tell you how often you should read. Relish will stimulate desire, and a good use of time will furnish many occasions. [3]

[3] In his Essays of Elia, Charles Lamb relates an amusing incident that carries with it a pertinent moral. "I had been invited, quite unexpectedly, to join a party whom I met near the door of the playhouse, and I happened to have in my hand a large octavo of Johnson and Stevens's *Shakespeare*, which the time not admitting of my carrying it home, of course went with me to the theatre. Just in the very heat and pressure of the door opening — *the rush*, as they term it, — I deliberately held the volume over my head, open at the scene in which the young Roscius had been most cried up, and quietly read by the lamplight. The clamor became universal. 'The affectation of the fellow,' cried one; 'Look at that gentleman *reading*, papa,' squeaked a young lady, who, in her admiration of the novelty, almost forgot her fears. I read on. 'He ought to have his book knocked out of his hands,' exclaimed a pursy cit, whose arms were too fast pinioned to his side to suffer him to execute his kind intention. Still I read on, and, till the time came to pay my money, kept as unmoved as St. Antony at

his holy offices, with the satyrs, apes, and hobgoblins mopping and making mouths at him in the pictures, while the good man sits as undisturbed at the sight as if he were the sole tenant of the desert."

The practice in religious communities of having one read while the others eat, has much to recommend it on the score of economy in time, though it may not stand the test of hygienic criticism. See Esther vi, for an instance in the life of King Assuerus, in which the reading of the chronicles of the kingdom to the sleepless monarch was the remote occasion of great blessings to the Jewish people.

HOW WE OUGHT TO READ.

HOW WE OUGHT TO READ.

IN dealing with this portion of our subject we shall be assisted by recalling Bacon's homely illustration, and by reference to Coleridge's classification of readers. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously (that is, not attentively); and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."[1] Some readers, according to Coleridge, are like hour-glasses; their reading, like the sand, runs in and out, without leaving any benefit. Many are like sponges; they imbibe everything, only to return it as it came, or filthier. Others are like the jelly-bag; they let the pure pass, but retain the dregs. A few are like the slaves of Golconda; they cast aside all that is worthless, but keep the precious stones. These words are worthy of serious thought. I

[1] Bacon.

venture, however, to dispute Bacon's second rule. If a book be worth reading at all, it ought to be read well.

I believe there is pith in Lamb's remark that much depends on *when* and *where* you read a book; and that

> "We get no good
> By being ungenerous, even to a book,
> And calculating profits, — so much help
> By so much reading. It is rather when
> We gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge
> Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
> Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth, —
> 'Tis then we get the right good from a book." [2]

The true method of study is to select only good authors, to read with measure, to think much, and to bring to our work the proper spirit.

> "Many books,
> Wise men have said, are wearisome; who reads
> Incessantly and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains —
> Deep versed in books, and shallow in himself." [3]

This spirit and judgment include, I would say, the acquisition of a taste for reading, or a development of such taste, with that care and supervision that will guarantee good work in the proper direction.

[2] Elizabeth B. Browning. [3] Milton.

"An acre thoroughly worked is better than a farm of weeds. It is not how much you read, but how much you make of it that tells. Make your road firm as you go, and keep to a definite aim. Many men spend more time on beginnings than would make them know much, if less unsettled, and end without finishing anything or knowing anything well." [4]

The oft-quoted lines of Pope will bear repetition: —

> "A little learning is a dangerous thing:
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
> There, shallow drafts intoxicate the brain,
> And drinking largely sobers us again."

A few words from Ruskin, that are of great value: "When you come to a good book you must ask yourself, 'Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would? Are my pickaxes and shovels in good order; and am I in good trim myself — my sleeves well up to the elbow, and my breath good, and my temper?' And keeping the figure a little longer, even at cost of tiresomeness, for it is a thoroughly useful one, the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are as the rock which you have to crush and smelt, in order to get at it. And your pick-

[4] Geikie.

axes are your own care, wit, and learning; your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without those tools and that fire; often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling, and patientest fusing, before you can gather one grain of the metal." He then proceeds to enforce the necessity of closely examining words, syllables, even letters; and from the last named, advances the idea that men who are conversant with literature have carefully considered the value of the very letters whence "literature" derives its name, and that this is the reason they are called men of "letters," and not men of "books" or "words." He illustrates the value of this point by a close analysis of a passage from Milton's "Lycidas."[5]

The benefit of *uninterrupted* reading, bearing on any given subject, ought to be evident; nevertheless, a judicious change to some other author or subject may relieve the mind, and affording a needed rest, enable us to return with heartier relish, keener perception, fuller grasp, and greater profit to our original course.

Hamerton is pointed when he says that the art of reading is to skip judiciously, to grasp all we need, to omit the rest. Tact and judgment, as well as an intelligent understanding of our own

[5] See "Sesame and Lilies" — first lecture.

peculiar circumstances, can alone guide us in this.[6]

"If thou wilt derive profit," Thomas à Kempis writes, "read with humility, and simplicity, and faith." "We ought," he continues, "to read devout and simple books as willingly as those that are high and profound."[7] Carlyle spoke in a like sense, though without the religious impulse of the immortal author of the "Following:" "Learn to be good readers, which is, perhaps, a more difficult thing than you imagine. Learn to be discriminative in your reading; to read faithfully and with your best attention, all kinds of things which you have a real interest in—a real, not an imaginary—and which you find to be really fit for what you are engaged in." "Concentration," says Lacordaire, "is the prime and sole element of strength. Learn to sound thoroughly a few lines of an author at a time. Nothing can be turned to account except what has ripened by meditation. A large range of reading dazzles the mind, and may, in the case of him who has a good memory,

[6] Oliver Wendell Holmes recommends his own practice of "book-tasting," by which he means such casual reading as a chance visit to a library or book-store may suggest.

[7] It is this spirit inculcated by À Kempis that the Royal Prophet praised when he declared its fruits: "I have understood more than all my teachers, because Thy testimonies are my meditation." Ps. cxviii.

dazzle others, but it gives neither solidity nor depth. Depth always supposes extent, but extent does not involve depth."

"He who reads with discernment and choice will acquire less learning, but more knowledge; and as this knowledge is connected with design, and cultivated with art and method, it will be at all times of immediate and ready use to himself and others.

> 'Thus useful arms in magazines we place,
> All rang'd in order, and disposed with grace;
> Nor thus alone the curious eye to please,
> But to be found, when need requires, with ease.'
>
> POPE.

He who reads without this discernment and choice will not be able to think, without which it is impertinent to read; nor to act, without which it is impertinent to think. He will assemble materials with much pains, and purchase them at much expense, and have neither leisure nor skill to frame them into proper scantlings, or to prepare them for use. To what purpose should he husband his time, or learn architecture? He has no design to build."[8] In another place, the same author says that such readers are a nuisance to society; "they read to talk, to shine in conversation, and to impose in company; having few ideas to vend of their

[8] Lord Bolingbroke.

own growth, they store their minds with crude, unruminated facts and sentences, and hope to supply, by bare memory, the want of imagination and judgment."

A writer not so well known as the brilliant viscount from whom I have made the previous extract, is Samuel Smiles, whose interesting work, "Self Help," contains many excellent points. Speaking of reading, he says: "The multitude of books which modern readers wade through may produce distraction as much as culture; the process leaving no more definite impression upon the mind than gazing through the shifting forms in a kaleidoscope does upon the eye. Reading is often but a mere passive reception of other men's thoughts, there being little or no active effort of the mind in the transaction. Then, how much of our reading is but the indulgence of a sort of literary epicurism, or intellectual dram-drinking, imparting a grateful excitement for the moment, without the slightest effect in improving or enriching the mind, or building up the character. Thus many indulge themselves in the conceit that they are cultivating their minds, when they are only employed in the humbler occupation of killing time." On this closing thought I would add the commentary that "killing time" is more serious than Mr. Smiles's words would indicate. "Killing

time" is the occupation of madmen, for whom, when time will be no more, there will be the vain and bitter regret mentioned in the Book of Wisdom, that verily they were fools. In the Scriptural sense this involves responsibility and guilt. In this I recall a notice I once read: "LOST — two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered, for they are gone forever."

Beware, then, of what is known as desultory reading, which takes its name from the vaulter leaping from horse to horse — the very type of the unsettled, inconstant, profitless. "Desultory reading," say the authors of "Guesses at Truth," "is, indeed, very mischievous, by fostering habits of loose, discontinuous thought, by turning the memory into a common sewer for rubbish of all thoughts to flow through, and by relaxing the power of attention, which of all our faculties most needs care, and is most improved by it. But a well-regulated course of study will no more weaken the mind than hard exercise will weaken the body; nor will a strong understanding be weighed down by its knowledge, any more than oak is by its leaves, or than Samson was by his locks. He whose sinews are drained by his hair must already be a weakling." "Desultory reading, like all desultory work, undoes to-day the progress of yester-

day, and leaves only so many failures. Butterfly readers, passing from book to book, and resting on none, can get little good. Nor does it do to jumble books without plan in your head. Determine on a course, and keep in it till you have mastered it." [9]

"By reading incoherently, without aim or order, you lose valuable time; and what is more, you get yourself out of the way of real work, which is a great misfortune for the mind. I would rather you read nothing than read at haphazard." [10]

"Flimsy, desultory readers, who fly from foolish book to foolish book, and get good of none, and mischief of all; are not these as foolish, unhealthy eaters who mistake their superficial, false desire after spiceries and confectioneries for the real appetite, of which, even they are not destitute, though it lies far deeper, far quieter, after solid, nutritive food?" [11]

The desultory reader is not only an aimless plodder, but he becomes an insipid absorber of all the views and opinions he reads. He is without character, independence, or thought of his own. He does not reason; he blindly accepts all that is offered. His mind loses its strength, for all solid thought has been crowded out by the mass of rubbish stored in its place. He borrows the tone and manner of his chance intellectual companions.

[9] Geikie. [10] Lacordaire. [11] Carlyle.

He loses all mental individuality. "Tree-frog minds, that take the color of the leaf on which they light for the time, are numerous," says Geikie; and again, "Multitudes make a bell-wether of whatever book they last read, and follow its tinkle with woolly-headed docility."

Brother Azarias, in his "Phases of Thought and Criticism," points out grave danger from such reading. After stating that we should bring to our studies "a well-defined standard of excellence, a cultivated taste that clearly discriminates between a novel or a poem of real merit and the trashy works that now glut the book market, and a decided and firm resolve to waste neither time nor talent upon reading that is useless or injurious," he uses this forcible illustration: "The man or boy that allows novel-reading, or, in fact, aimless reading of any description, to become a passion with him, thereby saps his mental, his moral, and his physical energy, as surely as the opium-eater destroys this three-fold energy by the inordinate use of opium, or the drunkard by excessive drink."

In a measure, I would say, we ought to read by subjects rather than by authors. We may thus acquire a facility for taking in a page at a glance, absorbing a book, as it were, mastering its contents, without troubling about its details; seizing

principles, while ignoring mere words. We should read with a view to the value of time, to our circumstances, our needs, our leisure, and to the likelihood of use in our state of life. Aim, then, at high but practical purposes. Be able to give yourself a reason why you read a book. Consider time and personal needs. Choose judiciously, and think seriously.

Remember that there is much that is good that you must omit, for time is fleeting.[12] Read with

[12] "It should always be borne in mind that the busiest reader must leave unread all but a mere fraction of the good books in the world. 'Be not alarmed because so many books are recommended,' says Bishop Potter; 'and do not attempt to read much or fast;' but 'dare to be ignorant of many things.' There are now 1,100,000 printed books in the library of the British Museum alone; and the library of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris contains more than 3,000,000 volumes. An experienced librarian has estimated that not less than 25,000 new books now appear annually; and yet the reading of a book a fortnight, or say twenty-five books a year, is quite as much as the average reader can possibly achieve — a rate at which only 1,250 books could be read in half a century: since this is so, he must be thoughtless and very timid who feels any shame in confessing that he is wholly ignorant of a great many books; and on the other hand, none but a very superficial and conceited reader will venture to express surprise at the deficiencies of others, when a little thought would make his own so clearly manifest. In Cowper's words, —

'Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.'"

CHARLES F. RICHARDSON.

"A few centuries since, five or six hundred manuscripts constituted a great library; but what would you say to libraries, such

pencil in hand, and carefully take notes, like that famous Greek scholar, Porson, of prodigious memory, though he always read the same thing six times, or wrote it thrice ere he could remember it.[13]

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as actually exist, containing three or four hundred thousand volumes; legions of authors at the same time busy, and a press going on with fearfully increasing activity, to double and quadruple the number? Unless some unforeseen mortality should break out among the progeny of the Muse, now that she has become so prolific, I tremble for posterity. . . . The world will inevitably be overstocked with good books. It will soon be the employment of a lifetime merely to learn their names. Before long a man of erudition will be little better than a mere walking catalogue."

IRVING.

Do not worry, therefore, that there is so much you do not know. At the end of his life Socrates remarked: "This only do I know: that I do not know." Aristotle declared that after a life of labor and study, he left this world, ignorant. Speaking of theological writings alone, St. Augustine said that if a man spent his days in their study from childhood to decrepit age, with talent, with devotedness, with full opportunity, there would still be much to learn. Cato's "Legere et non intelligere est negligere" is a play on the Latin words that cannot well be done into English, but its application is apposite. Seneca was right, therefore, when he said there was intemperance in reading as in other things; and Pythagoras' counsel is also to the point: "Take care that you have not more learning in your book-case than in your head."

[13] "In getting my books I have been always solicitous of an ample margin; this not so much through any love of the thing in itself, however agreeable, as for the facility it affords me of pencilling suggested thoughts, agreements, and differences of opinion, or brief critical comments in general. Where what I have to note is too much to be included within the narrow limits of a margin, I commit it to a slip of paper and deposit between the leaves."

EDGAR ALLEN POE.

Let your reading be a Columbus voyage, in which nothing will pass without note and speculation.[14] Remember while you read that mind is not exclusively on the side of the author; keep your independence.

> "Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
> By which the magic art of shrewder wits
> Holds an unthinking multitude enthralled." [15]

Remember that no tourist understands the country through which the rushing train carries him. He may possess a guide-book library, but he has not been able to observe for himself. Go slowly.[16] Life is short, but not so short that we must be whirled through it. Avoid, in reading, the danger of becoming a bolter or a skimmer. There are too many to-day who have graduated into this unhappy state. It is marvellous to hear some

[14] Geikie. [15] Cowper.

[16] The habit of rapid reading may be acquired, with advantage, if used only with less important matter such as fiction. Sydney Smith makes some judicious remarks on this subject, that are of general application: "The best way of reading books with rapidity, is to acquire that habit of severe attention to what they contain that perpetually confines the mind to the single object it has in view. When you have read enough to have acquired the habit of reading without suffering your mind to wander, and when you can bring to bear upon your subject a great share of previous knowledge, you may then read with rapidity; before that, as you have taken the wrong road, the faster you proceed, the more you will be sure to err."

chatter about the number of books they have read, and it is just as marvellous to learn how little they know of them. At times even the title of the so-called fascinating book is forgotten, as the dear young lady who dotes on the "lovely sermon" cannot even tell the subject or text. All this is very sad, for it tells of a mental blight and spiritual dwarfing which must grieve all who love their fellow-men. By such readers we are reminded of Nathaniel's declaration in "Love's Labor's Lost:" "Sir, he hath never fed on the dainties that are bred in a book; he hath not eaten paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink; his intellect is not replenished; he is only an animal, sensible only in the duller part."

I shall add a few extracts from rare old Thomas Fuller. I like the flavor of his style; it has a fragrance that adds a real value to his solid thoughts. Hear him, and be assured that though his message savors of the sixteenth century his wisdom is worthy of our day. "Soundly infix in thy mind what thou desirest to remember. What wonder is it if agitation of business jog that out of thy head which was there, rather tacked than fastened? It is best knocking in the nail over night, and clinching it next morning. Overburden not thy memory to make so faithful a servant a slave. Remember Atlas was weary. Have as much reason as

a camel, to rise when thou hast thy full load. Memory, like a purse, if it be over-full that it cannot shut, all will drop out of it. Take heed of a gluttonous curiosity to feed on many things, lest the greediness of the appetite of thy memory spoil the digestion thereof. Marshal thy notions into a handsome method. One will carry twice more weight trussed and packed up in bundles than when it lies untoward, flapping and hanging about his shoulders. Things fardled up under heads are most portable.

"Adventure not all thy learning in one bottom, but divide it betwixt thy memory and thy note-books. He that with Bias carries all his learning about him in his head, will utterly be beggared and bankrupt, if a violent disease, a merciless thief, should rob and strip him. A commonplace book [note-book] contains many notions in garrison, whence the owner may draw out an army into the field on competent warning."

Hear a word from Emerson: "The best rule of reading will be a method from nature, and not a mechanical one of hours and pages. It holds each student to a pursuit of his native aim, instead of a desultory miscellany. Let him read what is proper to him, and not waste his memory on a crowd of mediocrities. The three practical rules which I have to offer are: (1) Never read any

book that is not a year old; (2) never read any but famed books; (3) never read any but what you like; or, in Shakespeare's phrase, —

> 'No profit goes where there is no pleasure ta'en:
> In brief, sir, study what you most affect.' "

These rules of Emerson must not be too rigidly applied. A literal interpretation of the first and the second would bear hard on the works of many contemporary authors.[17]

Mere rules, be it understood, will never make solid readers or thinkers. While following suggestions — not in a servile way, but in their spirit, and with freedom for our own minds — we must work; we must absorb the good; we must digest it; we must make it a part of our own intellectual life. We must, therefore, exercise judicious selection: first, as to the books we read; and, secondly, as to the fruits of the books we choose; for in the best, some things that are inferior may be found, some things even injurious. In this, the bodily organs teach us an important lesson. Much of our wholesome food contains a measure of substance

[17] "One would think when the gentlemen who preside at the distribution of literary fame take pen in hand, it was only to blot reputations, and to put their seals to the packet which consigns every new-born effort to oblivion." — GOLDSMITH, in "The Bee." See also his "Letter lxxv," from a "Citizen of the World," bearing on this subject.

that may be considered poisonous. We do not on this account entirely reject such food, but we confide to the digestive organs the function of separation, by which the good is absorbed, and the refuse cast off. So should it be with our minds. That our glance may, perchance, light on some painting that is not to be commended is not sufficient reason for us to abandon a delightful saunter through a gallery containing works of real merit and genuine art. Custody of the eyes and control of the heart should be our guaranty. That our pleasant country stroll may lead us occasionally past a spot of marsh or swamp does not oblige us to abandon our walk. We can hurry on where miasma dwells, and linger longer in the green fields and shady woods.

Strengthen your memory, if necessary, by such plans as you may find efficacious in arranging studies by subjects, and by plans to which, however, I would advise you not to yield a slavish adherence.[18] Systems of *mnemonics* may be useful, but they are generally a burden, and to some they are their own reward. Their devotee never gets as far as applying them. Hamerton says they are

[18] Hamerton says bad memories are often the best; they are often the selecting memories, not like miscellaneous memories that take all put into them, as boxes. A good literary memory is not like a post-office that receives everything, but like a well-edited periodical that prints only what harmonizes with its intellectual life.

like a frying-pan on one coat-tail, and like a child's kite on another. In fact, I would counsel you to be willing to forget much, even good things. Be satisfied if you have the benefit. Do not waste time trying to remember how it all happened. "It is no more necessary," wrote Sydney Smith, "that a man should remember the different dinners and suppers which have made him healthy, than the different books which have made him wise. Let us see the result of good food in a strong body, and the result of great reading in a full and powerful mind."

Read, then, with attention, with method, with meditation. Remember that a good book may be read a second and a third time, and some oftener. Remember that some books require deep and frequent study;[19] that others can be taken more leisurely. Remember that though a book that is worth reading at all, is worth reading well, this does not

[19] The famous preacher, Bourdaloue, found the chief sources of his wonderful eloquence in the reading, which he repeated each year, of St. Paul, St. John Chrysostom, and Cicero. And I would also add an appropriate thought from Lord Bolingbroke: "The truth is, the most knowing man, in the course of the longest life, will have always much to learn, and the wisest and best much to improve." "I read in Livy," says Montaigne, "what another man does not, and Plutarch read there what I do not." Just so, the same man may read at fifty what he did not read in the same book at five and twenty; at least, I have found it so by my own experience on many occasions."

mean that you should devour it. You may approve the quality of a meal; you are not expected to clear the table. Remember Macaulay's striking words: "Better digest a page than swallow a volume;" and the Roman's significant utterance: "I fear a man of one book." [20]

[20] Ascribed to Seneca. See Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature," in which a very interesting chapter is devoted to the "man of one book."

WHAT WE OUGHT TO READ.

WHAT WE OUGHT TO READ.

I. — CHOICE OF BOOKS. — GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

AND now I come to what may be considered the practical application of the principles already set forth. What shall we read? Pope's warning is before me, to choose a book as we would a friend — and I know what a responsibility is this. Our difficulty is the greater because of the times we live in; for the Abbé Roux does not sneer, but weeps, when he says: "Literature was formerly an art, and finance a trade; to-day it is the reverse." The abbé's words are but an echo of Brownson's: "We regard an author class, or a class of professional authors whose vocation is simply authorship, not only as not desirable, but as a positive nuisance. They constitute one of the greatest pests of modern society."[1] If this were true forty years ago,

[1] Horace Greeley also vigorously denounced those who, without heroism in their souls, without zeal for the race, intruded themselves, by a sort of sacrilege, for mere easy living, into the ranks of authorship.

how much truer is it to-day? Nor are the following words from the same pen less true: "Every dapper little fellow, every sentimental young lady, married unhappily, or despairing of getting married, who can scribble a few lines, each beginning with a capital letter, or dash off a murderous tale about love, or an amorous tale about murder, is encouraged to turn author by profession, and finds no lack of opportunity to aid in deluging the land with nonsense, cant, sentimentality, sensuality, obscenity, and blasphemy." I wonder what the grand old man would say to-day if he could see the horde of venal and villanous scribblers, assassins of decency, piling high the book-stands with the productions of their vile minds and viler pens. From a vocation or art literature has passed through the stage of a profession, till with many it has sunk to the low level of a trade. Though neither a divinity nor a drudge — converse errors closely connected — literature has too often fallen from the liberty of the former state to the servitude of the latter. Ceasing to be the servant of Truth, it becomes the slave of the world, and ministers but to bondage. "The triumph of literature itself produces some of the evils it has to contend with. The number of readers has grown immensely large; the necessary consequence is, that there gradually comes into

[2] Aubrey de Vere.

existence a vast book-trade, ruled by the ordinary commercial laws of supply and demand. Now, there are objects enough which may become legitimate matters of barter, but thoughts are not of their number; and when that sinks into the commercial which was meant for higher things, the commerce becomes among the lowest that exists. The evil is increased when the wholesale or retail dealers are called on, not to meet the intellectual needs, but to provide intellectual luxuries, cosmetics, and trinkets. The flimsier the merchandise, the more unscrupulous will naturally be its vendors. . . . Bad books generate worse, until the swarm appears less the offspring of living intelligence than an insect race generated by intelligence dead." [3]

Every honest thinker must then admit that choice in reading is a delicate work; and yet the tendency to be negligent is as great now as when Cowper declared that men were

> "Too careless, often, as their years proceed,
> What friends they sort with or what books they read."

To discern the true from the false, the good from the bad, the gold from the base metal,

> "Is a rare scant performance." [4]

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[3] Aubrey de Vere. [4] Henry Vaughan.

Avoid the mistake of those who think that "one author is profound because he is clear; and that another is most profound, because, forsooth, he is unintelligible; whereas the truth may be that we cannot tell the *depth* of the latter's shallowness, because of the muddiness of his surface."[5] As a rule, do not read books that need abstruse study where truth should be clearly expressed. We are apt to lose the ideas while hunting for an explanation of their author's obscurity. Life is too short for such work.

Justly does Professor Egan say that everything between covers is not a book; nor can we wonder at the indignation of Charles Lamb, who confessed that it moved his spleen to see those "things in books' clothing, perched upon shelves, like false saints, usurpers of true shrines, intruders into the sanctuary, thrusting out the legitimate occupants. I never see these impostors," he adds, "but I long to strip them to warm my ragged veterans in their spoils."

The power of these "usurpers," spirits of darkness, under the guise of messengers of light, Mrs. Browning forcibly indicates: —

> "For the wicked there
> Are winged like angels; every knife that strikes
> Is edged from elemental fire to assail
> A spiritual life."

[5] Rev. F. Edward, C.P.

And where evil effects are not so grievous, we may find an array of stupidity that makes serious inroads on precious time. A passage from Dryden's "sublime of satire," in which he chastises Flecknoe and Shadwell, makers of verses in his day, is a telling picture of the tribe of dullards who persist in making books as well as verses: —

"All human things are subject to decay,
And, when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This FLECKNOE found, who, like Augustus, young
Was called to empire, and had governed long;
In prose and verse, was owned, without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense absolute.
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blessed with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state;
And pondering which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried 'Tis resolved; for nature pleads that he
Should only rule who most resembles me.
SHADWELL alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years;
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

. . . . . .

"So Shadwell swore, nor should his vow be vain,
That he to death, true dulness would maintain,
And in his father's right and realm's defence,
Ne'er to have peace with wit, nor truce with sense."

We feel disposed, even though we know how unavailing the lapse of two centuries renders the offer, to tender our condolence to the two writers so pitilessly lashed. The picture, however, is not overdrawn, of many of the "professional authors" of our time, from whom may protecting spirits save both young and old.

It is a difficult thing to offer more than general principles for the guidance of readers. Would that discretion's voice would always be heeded; for the supply of books is immense, and the demand for them steady.

Earnest men and women keenly feel the need of direction for the inexperienced, and through their efforts numerous agencies are endeavoring to stimulate and guide the taste of the young for reading. We have plans of study, courses of reading, reading circles, the Catholic Summer School, and an excellent publication called *The Catholic Reading Circle Review*, devoted to this object. Learned men have drawn up lists and named a certain number of the greatest books in the world; but when the doctors disagree, who can decide?

A suggestion that I think will be advantageous: Do not renounce your own individuality. Do not become a slave to rules, a mere sieve for filtering other men's thoughts. Have your own likes and dislikes, and do not be afraid to express them.

Cant, and humbug, and pretence spoil a great many people who would otherwise be very amiable, if they had only a stronger moral spine. Do not get into a strait-jacket, by binding yourself in cast-iron rules. "Books are made for men, not men for books," "Many men of many minds," and "What is one man's meat is another man's poison," are old saws worth remembering. Do not shout and toss your cap high in air at the dictatorial utterances of every literary Pooh Bah. Many of the critics and self-appointed guides assume not only the general ignorance of every one else, not only their inability to choose for themselves, but they would almost deny them the right of expressing a preference. Agnes Repplier always writes entertainingly. A word from her "Essay on Literary Shibboleths:" "Lamb recognized, by a swift and delicate intuition, the literary food that was best fitted to nourish his own intellectual growth. This was Sir Walter Scott's secret, and this was Lamb's. Both knew instinctively what was good for them; and a clear perception of our individual needs is something vastly different from idle preference based on an ignorant conceit. It is what we have, each of us, to learn, if we would hope to thrive; and while we may be aided in the effort, yet a general command to read and enjoy all great authors seldom affords us the precise assistance

we require." "Do not be distressed," says Henry Drummond, "if you do not like time-honored books, or classical works, or recommended books. We all have different minds, and we are all at different stages of growth. Some other day we may find food in the recommended book, though we would possibly starve on it to-day. The mind develops and changes, and the favorites of this year, also, may one day cease to interest us."

Professor Egan claims that there are not fifty really great books in all languages. But even if a list of great books were established by universal consent, we have to consider the rapid influx of publications making constant and distracting demands on readers. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes writes seriously on this question: "Now, the rivulet which the press poured out four centuries ago has widened with every succeeding generation till it is no longer a stream within its banks, but an inundation. Books, reviews, magazines, newspapers, come in upon us like a flood, and the landmarks of our old literature are lost sight of, if they are not swept away. There never was a time when young readers" — and old ones too, let me add — "were in need of such guidance."

A plague is upon us, worse, as a recent writer says, than the irruption of frogs that covered Egypt. "It is one of the most loathsome, one of

the most frightful, one of the most ghastly, of the ten plagues of our modern cities. There is a vast number of books and newspapers printed and published which ought never to see the light. They are filled with a pestilence that makes the land swelter with a moral epidemic." Hear also on this, Dr. Geikie: "Make a conscience of reading nothing inferior. Stupidity or commonplace is tolerable only when no better can be had, like bread of moss or sawdust that needs a famine to get it down, except with simpletons, who will eat anything. Men gave up acorns when they raised wheat, and black bread has no chance against white where there is either taste or sense. To read every book that one comes across, even of our own particular kind, as an ostrich eats whatever comes in its way, is to invite mental and moral dyspepsia and disease to any stomach less than miraculous. Negro dirt-eaters swell out with their vile load, and yet grow leaner each day. Coarse feeding makes coarse flesh. Filthiness, like toadstools, springs rank from invisible seed, and the whole race of unclean books is no better than smuts, and moulds, and mildews. Do not hunt the sewers for chance spoons or shillings."

It has been well said that the literature of a nation decides the fate of a nation. It should be our desire, therefore, not only to oppose what is

immoral, but to cultivate Catholic literature and to promote its interest as best calculated to advance the true interest of our country. And here I would quote a thoughtful passage from Dr. Brownson: "Catholic literature, no matter what its faults, is pervaded by a Christian spirit. Protestant literature is essentially heathen. Its form is sometimes Christian, but its groundwork, its main substance, is heathen. The Catholic often accommodates the Christian thought to the classical form; the Protestant sometimes the heathen thought to the Christian form." On this score many Catholics might be arraigned. Truth would compel them to plead guilty to the indictment charging them with indifference to the work of Catholic authors, and with disregard of the influence that could be yielded by such a body of auxiliaries laboring for the Church, in close union with the pulpit, and generously encouraged by men and women loving the kingdom of God on earth, and anxious for its extension. We have great contemporary names in every branch of learning, writers who are foremost in the discussion of every topic of living interest or value; yet English Protestant and American non-Catholic thought largely dominates the minds of some of our shallow Catholics.

The stream cannot rise higher than its source.

Our bodily food determines the health of our blood; we are not better than what we eat. And so it is with the mind and heart; they are amenable to the laws of their nourishment. Who sees not this is blind; but teachers, librarians, priests, know the extent of the evil of bad reading as others cannot know it. As a priest I can bear testimony; and in the name of public purity, I plead, and for the sake of innocent hearts and minds yet uncontaminated — yes, for the rescue of those already defiled — I protest against this scourge of bad publications. Every Catholic should protest against those that are positively evil, and against those that are sensational, against even the absurd and the improbable. He should protest against the majority of weekly papers of fiction. Those especially for children are, in many cases, the most powerful agents of Satan. I appeal to the daily record of crimes to bear me out in saying that the curse of many a life that has been blighted by divorce, scandal, murder, or suicide, the result of disordered brains and corrupted hearts, is chargeable to bad reading in youth.

Truly "there should be no bookless house in all this land, least of all among Catholics whose ancestors in Christ preserved all that is great in literature," [6] but eternal vigilance must be the

[6] Maurice F. Egan. On this subject, consult Hallam's "Middle Ages," Part I, chatper ix, where this writer, who is often

price of freedom from a plague. Let not the choosing of books be left to chance. Put brains as well as money into it, and let quality rather than quantity decide. Even the poorest may make a beginning, and judicious economy will enable a man of good-will to set aside, even from a scanty income, sufficient to make steady, if not numerous, additions to his household library. The gradual formation of a competent collection of books will thus go on, and in a few years the man of modest beginnings will be agreeably surprised to find what a treasure he has amassed. And in this, no sacrifice of needed comforts in other ways is demanded; good-will, sincere determination, and an economy that will bear exclusively on unnecessary things, will be the chief elements in accomplishing this good work. "I would urge upon every young man, as the beginning of his due and wise provision for his household, to obtain, as soon as he can, by the severest economy, a restricted, serviceable, and steadily, however slowly, increasing series of books for use through life; making his little library, of all the furniture in his room, the most studied and decorative piece; every volume having its assigned place, like a little statue in its niche, and one of the earliest and strictest lessons to the children of the house being how to turn the pages

prejudiced, bears testimony in favor of the invaluable labors of our Catholic forefathers.

of their own literary possessions lightly and deliberately, with no chance of tearing or dogs' ears. . . . How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public or private, as compared with what we spend on our horses? If a man spends lavishly on his library, you call him mad, a biblio-maniac. But you never call any one a horse-maniac, though men ruin themselves every day by their horses, and you do not hear of people ruining themselves by their books." [7]

"Let us pity," said Henry Ward Beecher, "those poor rich men who live barrenly in great, bookless houses. Let us congratulate the poor that, in our day, books are so cheap that a man may every year add a hundred volumes to his library for the price which his tobacco and his beer cost him. Among the earliest ambitions to be excited in clerks, workmen, journeymen, and, indeed, among all that are struggling up in life from nothing to something, is that of owning and constantly adding to a library of good books. A little library growing larger every year is an honorable part of a young man's history. It is a man's duty to have books. A library is not a luxury, but one of the necessaries of life." [8]

The lives of many men and women who have attained reputations in a literary way illustrate

[7] Ruskin. [8] Richardson's "Choice of Books."

the benefit of early association with books, and the life-long impressions made on their minds, in childhood, by familiarity with the few good books that formed the humble library of their unpretentious homes.

Do not commit the error of treating books as fashions, good for a season, and then to be thrown aside. A good book is always a friend; a bad one is always an enemy. Seek the few books that are immortal, for many are still-born; more die very properly in their cradles; others come out and enjoy a season; some endure to a green old age; but the immortals can easily be counted. Seek the books of genius, of the men who think, and of the men who make you think. Seek the books that have done more for the human race than war or diplomacy has done.

Remember that as a man sinks or rises to the level of his habitual society, so is it of mind and of books. Be at least as careful of your intellectual companionships as you are of those that are social. Purity of mind is assuredly as much to be desired as tone and place in society, nor may truth be sacrificed for aught that the spirit of the world can give. I admit that danger is on every side, that bad books are not the only temptations. I know that dwelling even in the desert would not be a safeguard, for deep down in our nature lies

evil; but I also know that care in seeking only what will elevate will aid us in purifying our higher powers, and in securing their dominion over the lower soul. The mud will not be removed from the river's bottom, but it will settle; and over the hardening surface the waters will flow in clearness undisturbed.

And here I commend to you the advice of Lord Lytton: "It is a great preservative to a high standard in taste and achievement to take, every year, some one great book as an especial study, not only to be read, but to be carried, studied, and brooded over; to go into the country with it, travel with it, be devotedly faithful to it; be without any other book for the time; compel yourself thus to read it again and again. Who can be dull enough to pass long days in the intimate, close, familiar intercourse with some transcendent mind, and not feel the benefit of it when he returns to the common world?"

II.— POETRY.

A JUDICIOUS writer makes another excellent suggestion: "Keep your reading well proportioned to the two great divisions of poetry and prose."[9]

[9] Henry Reed.

As to the former I would remind you of Pope's "Know the poet from the man of rhyme," from "the poor slave in metre, dull and addlepated,"[10] from "the dull pretenders grappling for the prize" whom Byron so mercilessly lashed in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers."

> "Behold! in various throngs the scribbling crew,
> For notice eager, pass in long review,
> Each spurs his jaded Pegasus apace,
> And rhyme and blank maintain an equal race."

I would also recall the words of the Jesuit martyr, Robert Southwell, a poet of true piety, and of simple yet eloquent diction. "Poets," he means the mere rhymesters, "by abusing their talents, and making the follies and feignings of love the customary subject of their base endeavors, have so discredited this faculty that a poet, a lover, and a liar are by many reckoned but three words of one signification. The devil, as he affecteth deity and seeketh to have all the compliments of divine honor applied to his service, so hath he, among the rest, possessed also most poets with idle fancies."

> "But soft, — a poet is a word soon said,
> A book's a thing soon written. Nay indeed,
> The more the poet shall be questionable,
> The more unquestionably comes his book."[11]

[10] Dryden. [11] Elizabeth B. Browning.

Pope suffered from the throng; and in sympathy for the poor little man we can still hear his cry for relief: —

"Shut, shut the door, good John! fatigued, I said;
Tie up the knocker, say I'm sick, I'm dead.
The dog-star rages! nay, 'tis past a doubt
All Bedlam or Parnassus is let out:
Fire in each eye, and papers in each hand,
They rave, recite, and madden round the land."

This reminds me of Horace. In his well-known Epistle, commonly called the "Ars Poetica," he expresses his wonder at the crime committed by the rhymester, that —

"The gods have plagued him with this curse of rhymes,
Whether his father's ashes he disdained,
Or hallowed ground with sacrilege profaned:
Certain he's mad, and like a baited bear,
If he hath strength enough his den to tear,
With all the horrors of a desperate muse,
The learnèd and unlearnèd he pursues,
But if he seize you, then the torture dread!
He fastens on you till he reads you dead,
And like a leech, voracious of his food,
Quits not his cruel hold till gorged with blood." [12]

We can thus appreciate Hotspur's indignant answer to Glendower, who had boasted that he "had framed to the harp many an English ditty lovely well:"—

"I had rather be a kitten and cry mew
Than one of these same metre ballad mongers;

[12] Francis' translation.

I had rather hear a brazen canstick turn'd,
Or a dry wheel grate on the axle-tree;
And that would set my teeth nothing on edge,
Nothing so much as mincing poetry:
'Tis like the forced gait of a shuffling nag." [13]

"By poetry, therefore, I do not mean rhyme and jingle. I do not mean the doggerel of Hudibras, nor the vulgarity of Swift, nor the sensuality of Swinburne: I mean the human divinity of Homer, Virgil, and Dante; or, at the least, I mean the divine humanity of Tennyson and Wordsworth and Longfellow. I mean the poetry of the poet "whose eye in a fine frenzy rolling," gazes from heaven to earth, from man to God; and who is described as heavenly, or divine, by Horace: —

"The bard is he
Who boasts a genius bold, creative, free;
Whose fancy, when diviner thoughts inspire,
Springs up aloft to soar on wings of fire;
Whose words in more than mortal accents roll,
And echo back the greatness of his soul."

And whom Juvenal delineates, perhaps with finer touch as, —

"The bard of every age and clime,
Of genius fruitful and of soul sublime,
Who from the glowing mint of fancy pours
No spurious metal, fused from common ores,
But gold to matchless purity refined,
And stamped with all the Godhead in his mind;
He whom I feel, but want the power to paint."

[13] 1 King Henry IV.

"The heavenly, the divine, —'tis such they all pronounce him, — how can the mind of man come in touch with his spirit without quivering to the vibration of his supernatural thoughts and emotions!" [14]

By poetry I mean "the exquisite expression of exquisite sentiments;" [15] "the only fit speech for music — music, I say, the most divine striker of the senses." [16] I mean "the vision and the faculty divine;" [17] that glorious heritage of which Cowper more fully and more eloquently speaks when he describes it as, —

> "Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
> Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought,
> Fancy, that from the bow that spans the sky,
> Brings colors dipp'd in Heaven that never die,
> A soul exalted above earth, a mind
> Skill'd in the characters that form mankind;
> And marks, whatever clouds may interpose,
> Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close,
> An eye like his to catch the distant goal,
> Or, ere the wheels of verse begin to roll,
> Like his to shed illuminating rays
> On every scene and subject it surveys."

"Poetry we will call *musical thought*. The poet is he who thinks in that manner. All right poems are songs; whatever is not *sung* is properly no

[14] Rev. F. Edward, C. P.
[15] The Abbé Roux.
[16] Sir Philip Sidney.
[17] Wordsworth.

poem, but a piece of prose cramped into jingling lines. It is only when the heart of him is rapt into true passion of melody, and the very tones of him, according to Coleridge's remark, become musical by the greatness, depth, and music of his thoughts, that we can give him right to rhyme and sing; that we call him poet, and listen to him as the Heroic of speakers, whose speech *is* song. Pretenders to this are many; and to an earnest reader, I doubt, it is for the most part a very melancholy, not to say an insupportable business, that of reading rhyme." [18]

"When the soul of the poet has come to ripeness of thought, she detaches and sends away from it its poems or songs, a fearless, sleepless, deathless progeny, which is not exposed to the accidents of the weary kingdom of time; a fearless, vivacious offspring, clad with wings (such was the virtue of the soul out of which they came), which carry them fast and far, and infix them irrevocably into the hearts of men. These wings are the beauty of the poet's soul. The songs, thus flying immortal from their mortal parent, are pursued by clamorous flights of censures, which swarm in far greater numbers, and threaten to devour them; but these last are not winged. At the end of a very short leap they fall plump down, and rot, having received from the

[18] Carlyle.

souls out of which they came no beautiful wings. But the melodies of the poet ascend, and leap, and pierce into the deeps of infinite time." [19]

"With the true poet everything is terse, touching, or brilliant. He gives the choicest thoughts in the choicest language. He illustrates by everything that he sees most striking in nature and art. He enriches them by pictures of human life, such as it is passing before him. His writings, therefore, contain the spirit, the aroma if I may use the phrase, of the age in which he lives. They are caskets which enclose within a small compass the wealth of the language — its family jewels, which are thus transmitted in a portable form to posterity. The setting may occasionally be antiquated, and require now and then to be renewed, as in the case of Chaucer; but the brilliancy and intrinsic value of the gems continue unaltered." [20]

Apart from versification, "poetry has a language of its own, which speaks so pleasingly to the heart, and so pleasingly to the imagination, that its meaning cannot possibly be misunderstood by any person of delicate sensations. It is a species of painting with words, in which figures are happily conceived, ingeniously arranged, affectingly expressed, and recommended with all the warmth and harmony of

[19] Emerson. By "infinite time," understand "eternity."
[20] Irving.

coloring: it consists of imagery, description, metaphors, similes, and sentiments, adapted with propriety to the subject, so contrived and executed as to soothe the ear, surprise and delight the fancy, mend and melt the heart, elevate the mind, and please the understanding." [21]

Of this genuine poetry, Mrs. Browning's enthusiastic praise is not overdrawn: —

> "O life! O poetry!
> Which means life in life! cognizant of life
> Beyond this blood-beat, passionate for truth
> Beyond these senses!"

The study of such divine productions cannot but be ennobling, refining, and spiritualizing; it initiates us, as it were, into mysteries, whereby our souls, freed for the time from earthly impediments, live a higher and a better life.

III. — DANGER OF SENTIMENTAL READING.

At this point, to recur to Southwell, who so strongly condemns sentimental "poetry," I am also reminded of the Abbé Roux, himself a poet and a most competent judge of literature, who warns us against the sentimental, in general reading, which, he declares, is "dangerous in piety,

[21] Goldsmith.

in morality, in literature, in everything." "All books," says Brownson, "which seek the sources of their interest in the passion or sentiment of love, are to be distrusted, and so indeed are all which, no matter in what degree, foster a sentimental tendency. Sentimentalism," he adds, "is the deadliest enemy to true piety and to all real strength or worth of character. It enervates the soul, subverts the judgment, and lays the heart open to every temptation. The staple literature of our time, the staple reading of our youth of both sexes, is sentimental novels and love tales; and the effects are manifest in the diseased state of the public mind, and in the growing effeminacy of character and depravation of morals." What is known as "public opinion" assumes at times the attitude of indignation, and strong denunciation is flung at the evil of which Dr. Brownson complained, and which has grown and multiplied in the intervening years; but we know full well that his vigorous words are not too strong for the unfortunate condition of the public taste in our own day.

IV. — SPECIAL HINTS ON CHOOSING BOOKS.

In further explanation of the principles advanced, I would say that the best books for us are not always those recommended in a general way by learned

men, but the books that suit our peculiar needs, purposes, duties. The milliner would scarcely enjoy a treatise on farming, nor would the most scholarly bucolic make her hats more bewitching to the ladies' eyes, or more exhausting to their husbands' purses. So the latest hints on Parisian vagaries, with "cutest" cuts representing such "loves of bonnets," would be of little use in assisting Rusticus to look after his fences.

Read no book that may not improve by repeated reading, and that you may not open again with renewed pleasure. Remember Ruskin's words on this point. Avoid, too, the error of those scored by Pope: —

> "Some foreign writers, some our own, despise;
> The ancients only or the moderns prize."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Others for language all their care express,
> And value books, as women men, for dress."

Look beyond forms and methods and expressions, though these are not without value. Seek through the cultivation of mind and heart, the advancement and uplifting of your own lives, as well as greater power in behalf of others. God's interests are involved in the good we may do to our fellow-men.

Follow Bacon's advice, and "read history that you may be wise; poetry that you may be witty; mathematics that you may be subtile; natural

philosophy that you may be deep; moral philosophy that you may be grave; and logic and rhetoric that you may be able to contend."

V. — AN ORDER OF READING SUGGESTED.

But I shall offer a more precise, a more detailed rule, such as, it seems to me, right reason demands that we should follow. Considering the high claims of our souls, and the eternal life that is in store for us, we must yield the first place to spiritual reading. Under this head I would place, above all, the Holy Scriptures, but only as they are guarded and explained by capable men. Thus only do they become a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths. Next, I would advise a careful study of that wonderful institution established by Jesus Christ — the Catholic Church. Truly ignorant, and wofully so, is the man who knows not, at least in some measure, the marvellous career of the Church of God. Criminally ignorant is the Catholic who has been signed and sealed as a soldier of Jesus Christ, and who does not study the glorious record of the Church, the development of her doctrine, the work of her councils, her triumphs over heresies, her achievements in behalf of the arts and sciences — all that is comprised under the name of historical Christianity. Closely connected with this are the lives of

the Saints, powerfully illustrating a divine mark of the Church — her holiness — and urging us to more earnest efforts in our laggard way. "As a matter of fact and history, it cannot be denied that the reading of the lives of the Saints has wonderfully stimulated and increased piety in the church." [22]

Furthermore, read such books as enlarge upon the dogmas and ceremonies of the Church; works of controversy, recognized commentaries on the Scriptures, so that you may be able to give a reason for the faith and the hope that are in you. Read books that are especially devoted to the enlightenment of souls in treading the narrow way of the spiritual life. Of such books there is no dearth; all phases of the inner life are considered; provision is made for all shades of disposition. After the Bible I name but four works: "The Following of Christ," "The Spiritual Combat," "The Sinner's Guide," "The Devout Life." These books are suitable for all dispositions, at all times. They will never die; they will forever survive the wreck of many weak craft that venture from day to day on the high seas of ascetic literature.

VI. — HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

Next, I would say, read history, which, "at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of

[22] Father Faber.

poetry and philosophy," [23] by which a man "passes through the whole cycle of experience, and feels the periods he has lived." [24] But, unfortunately, Emerson is right when he says that much that goes under the name of history is only "a shallow village tale;" and Agnes Repplier speaks of it as a calumniated muse whose sworn votaries do her little honor. De Maistre was even more emphatic, because more truthful, when he denounced the "history" of the past three hundred years as a conspiracy against truth. And in this denunciation he is not alone. "The ancients," writes the Abbé Roux, "made of history a panegyric — we have made it a libel;" or, in the energetic words of Bolingbroke, either "a lying panegyric or a lying satire." [25] The true function of history, to quote Herodotus, the Father of History, is "to rescue from oblivion the memory of former incidents, and to render a just tribute of renown to many great and wonderful actions" of

[23] Macaulay, who says that we have plenty of historical romances, and historical essays, but no histories properly so called. At least, he so decides, from the qualifications he would desire in a great historian whose coming, he declares, should be hailed as a wonder. There is only too much truth in Macaulay's claim. Like many others, he did not practise as well as he preached.

[24] Emerson.

[25] When Voltaire unguardedly wrote to a correspondent that the object he aimed at was not historical truth, but to make a burlesque, and that he made a good hit, he fitly described many others who, if they ape not his vulgarity and infidelity, are at least his worthy followers as "historians."

men. "It is the historian's duty," wrote Tacitus, the greatest of the Roman chroniclers, "to rejudge the conduct of men, that generous actions may be snatched from oblivion, and that the author of pernicious counsels, and the perpetrator of evil deeds, may see beforehand the infamy that awaits them at the tribunal of posterity." But, by many of our modern historians, the principle is disregarded that "eternity should be the groundwork of the history of time; everything being referred to God as the universal cause. Thus only will religion lead to the explanation of the most incomprehensible facts in history." [26] "The philosophy of history! the philosophy of history! That is the only cry that is audible. It is an abuse. When will it be said, 'The theology of history'?" [27]

Considering our present advanced state of culture, and how the Torch of Science has now been brandished and borne about, with more or less effect, for five thousand years and upwards; how, in these times especially, not only the torch still burns, and perhaps more fiercely than ever, but innumerable rushlights and sulphur-matches, kindled thereat, are also glancing in every direction, so that not the smallest cranny or doghole in nature or art can re-

[26] Chateaubriand.

[27] The Abbé Roux. Don Quixote had the right idea when he said that history should be like sacred writing — truth, to deserve to have God with it.

main unilluminated, — it ought to strike the reflective mind with some surprise" [28] that so many misrepresentations and perversions have made headway, in defiance of truth, and under the guise of what should ever be truth's most loyal handmaid. Read, therefore, histories written by honest men, loving truth, free by the power of truth, knowing whereof they speak. Such genuine history "will not only bring the past before us in the present, but, in a certain sense, the future also, and thus will rivet the mind's gaze in elevating and delightful reflection. Happy and enlightened the man who has ranged over the vast panorama of the world's history, who has conversed with the heroes and sages of all time, who has watched the rise and fall, and contemplated the ruins of empires. He has added thousands of years to the otherwise brief span of life, and has lived the length of all the epochs his reading has embraced. We should be as old as the world's history; for age is better measured by the march of thought, the acquisition of knowledge, and the reminiscences of memory, than by the flight of hours in the brief passage of mortal life." [29]

Be conversant in a special manner with the story of our own country; it is a wonderful record. Read the biographies of great men and women, the most universally pleasant of things,[30] Longfellow's favor-

[28] Carlyle. [29] Rev. F. Edward, C.P. [30] Carlyle.

ite reading, and the only proper history, according to Emerson, and feel the pulse of their noble lives, so that you may leave "footprints on the sands of time." Read books of travel; they will introduce you to other worlds; they will broaden your minds; they will deepen your human sympathies; they will help you to a better meaning of the "brotherhood of man, and the Fatherhood of God." Thus may we break down the barriers between the past and the present, annihilate space, and, living in all lands, become the heirs of all time, — "the contemporaries of all ages and fellow-citizens of all peoples." [31]

Popular science, social economy, moral philosophy, have been so thoroughly discussed that manuals for general use are within the reach of all. For those who are not familiar with other languages than their mother-English, the labors of editors and translators have laid open the treasures of classic literature; and their industry in this line keeps pace with the contemporary issue of the European book markets. I abstain from naming authors or books under any head. Ruskin demolished Sir John Lubbock's list of one hundred "best" books, and many others have engaged in the same harmless diversion of telling what they consider the greatest works. Libraries are numerous, courses

[31] The Abbé Roux.

of studies detailed, and capable direction available to earnest individuals. I have already referred to "The Catholic Reading Circle Review." Its assistance should be of much value to young students.[32]

VII. — MAGAZINES.

It now remains for me to speak of magazines, newspapers, and novels — three great elements in the reading of to-day, whose power is admitted both as a factor for good and for evil. I shall quote Ruskin's advice to beginners. After telling them to keep out of the salt swamps of literature, and to live on a little rocky island of their own, he says, "Among modern books, avoid, generally, magazines and review literature. Sometimes it may contain a useful abridgement or a wholesome piece of criticism; but the chances are ten to one it will either waste your time or mislead you. If you want to understand any subject whatever, read the best book upon it you can hear of, not a review of the book." "Magazine and review readers are

[32] Edited and published by Warren E. Mosher, Youngstown, Ohio. I would also recommend a little work published by Benziger Brothers, New York: "Reading and the Mind, with Something to Read," by Rev. J. F. X. O'Connor, S.J. It contains, besides other good things, a list of well-chosen books on different subjects.

a countless army. They spend years in detached and fragmentary reading that, after all, does not make even an intelligible mosaic, and remain ignorant of more than separate facts and partial glimpses to the end. There can be very little to learn when a few pages can teach it. They carry about a brick as a model of the temple of knowledge. . . . Your trifling readers fill their minds, as children fill their pockets; they have the intellectual counterparts of the cherry-stones, the broken knife, the bits of glass, the top and string, the old pipe, and the piece of slate-pencil." [33]

From these sentiments we must not conclude to a wholesale denunciation of current literature. Admitting the danger that magazines may beget a habit of desultory reading, and thus interfere with a love for books, it may be said of the best of these periodicals that they wield a considerable influence in behalf of culture and refinement, by bringing to a very large class of readers some of the best thoughts of living authors on a practically unlimited number of subjects. Talents and money they command; and the people have the enjoyment of their accumulated resources, literary and artistic, at a trifling cost. In a literary way, Catholic magazines keep pace with their secular contemporaries. A more generous support by

[33] Geikie.

Catholics would encourage both editors and publishers to add material and artistic worth to these periodicals.

VIII. — NEWSPAPERS.

Of newspapers I find it difficult to write with the earnestness demanded by the case, without seeming harsh. However, as I address myself to the judgment of my readers, I also appeal to their experience. To every man and woman this is a serious question. I do not ask you to agree with Carlyle when he sneers at the British press as "the most egregious blunder in modern literature," nor do I ask you to apply his stinging words to our American journalism; but I urge thought proportioned to the interests involved, and I would say that intelligent people will not be carried away by the mere cry of "The free press," nor will its many advantages blind them to its serious drawbacks.

> "Thou god of our idolatry —
> Thou ever bubbling spring of lies."

I admit the severity of these lines by Cowper, but I cannot deny their truth, especially when we consider journalism as it is often conducted. The country is full of newspapers; they are everywhere, ranging from the dull heavy bore,

that, with "patent inside" and scissored fillers, weekly afflicts its long-suffering constituents, or delights (?) them, to the magnificent metropolitan daily that is the wonder of the age. They all deal in that indefinite thing called "news," by which men chiefly understand the iniquities of their fellows. After listening to John A. Cockerill, a non-Catholic, a veteran New York editor, I question if careful parents will allow their children to read the daily papers. "The Daily Crimes," he says, "would be the best name for almost any sensational newspaper of to-day. The constant effort made to secure, by telegraph, by special correspondence, or by indefatigable reporters, at any cost, and to present in the most meretricious form and at any sacrifice, occurrences which will catch the curious eye and hold the morbid fancy, has found its best reward, unquestionably, in the accumulation of newspaper millions, and the erection of costly newspaper buildings. But there seems a certain desecration in applying the superlative of good to such a result; there is nothing good in it, and cannot be. . . . The daily record might well make good men shudder, and angels weep."

Again, he stigmatizes the absolute lack of respect for privacy and decency, and the prostitution of brain and power, in order that a paper may

present the most recent divorce, the most painful death, the most disgusting elopement that can be heard of, by fair means or foul. "Give the people what they want, and the very worst of it might," he says, "be an appropriate sentiment for the head of the editorial page."

I admit that, as the world goes, newspapers are relatively necessary. We desire to know many things that can be learned only through such publications. But herein discrimination must have sway. A man who reads indecent papers belongs to a class that clamors for an impure supply to gratify an impure appetite. And this supply is often in excess even of the demand; and thus a fresh demand is created, and so the impious work goes on. A heavy responsibility must be divided between venal publishers and a debauched public. A man who reads nothing but newspapers, even if they are not unclean, cannot be a full man. He must be shallow; for this so-called moulder of public opinion often seeks, not to direct men, but to run with the crowd. And this is a fact, a condition, confined to no particular section of the United States. "The average daily is put together to please the mob, and edited in all its columns with a painstaking effort to avoid offence to the prejudice of the ignorant."[34] It is a proverb

[34] San Francisco Argonaut.

among "newspaper men" that there is little independence or freedom allowed to journalists. In many cases a graded system of checks, beginning with the mutilation (?), by the city editor, of the blossoming young reporter's eloquent periods, finds its climax in the "supervision," by the owner or manager, of the editor himself, who frequently receives a large salary, not for the honest opinions he writes, but for the honest opinions he keeps out of the paper. Too often, men of intelligence and culture are forced to become the vassals of rich men behind the scenes, who purchase the time and talents of those more gifted, but financially less fortunate than themselves. There are, indeed, notable and worthy exceptions, but the testimony of journalism against itself deserves the attention of all good citizens. However, the evil is not a new one. Years ago Dr. Brownson described the press of his day thus: "The popularity of a paper is in an inverse ratio to its worth. It is popular by virtue of appealing to popular passion or prejudice, by encouraging popular tendencies, falling in with the spirit of the people or the age." And he gave solid reasons why a "popular" journal could be only harmful to its readers: "It is an absurd thing," he wrote, "the work of demagogues, to pretend that all men can reason on all subjects, or be brought up to the standard of

"leaders," — absurd to discuss certain questions in newspapers. They are not read. People do not relish them. Hence, with so many, there is the realization that the more flimsy and even sensational the paper is, the more popular it will be, the more money it will make." And long before Dr. Brownson, Edmund Burke considered the newspapers, then not as numerous or as powerful as they now are, the most efficient agents in spreading the principles of the French revolutionists. "The seeds," he wrote, "are sown almost everywhere, chiefly by newspaper circulation. And they are a more important instrument than generally is imagined. They are a part of the reading of all, they are the whole of the reading of the far greater number. The writers of these papers, for the greater part, are either unknown or in contempt; but they are like a battery, in which the stroke of any one ball produces no great effect, but the amount of continual repetition is decisive. Let us only suffer any person to tell us his story, morning and evening, but for one twelve-month, and he will become our master."

"If we take away from the daily newpaper as it is at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century what all must condemn as its faults, the public would probably decline to buy the remainder. In other words, it is exactly by reason

of its glaring obliquities and moral shortcomings, sad as it may seem, that the great metropolitan newspaper is now apparently enabled to address an audience of millions each morning, to dictate to presidents, to bully statesmen, to desecrate the sanctity of the fireside, and to violate all that the family and the individual hold dear."[35] This is a picture not overdrawn, of what is often spoken of as *the freedom of the press.* Liberty still stands unwilling sponsor for many a crime. I think, then, that it may be said that the mere newspaper reader is not such from sympathy with his fellow-men in misfortune; he is not compassionate for human misery or weakness; he is not worried that God is so often offended; no, he devours the newspapers and relishes nothing else, because he is cursed with a fearful appetite for sensation and scandal, for the story of depravity, and for the unsavory record of shameful deeds, for the details of the brutal prize-fight; and such an appetite is the sure sign of diseased, often of contaminated minds; of ill-regulated, often of corrupted hearts; of a disposition wholly at variance with the laws of the Creator, who has endowed man with intelligence, and planted affections in his heart, in order that he might make a right use of the one and the other. The Creator demands that we should use time wisely; but here

[35] John A. Cockerill.

most newspaper readers are criminally negligent. The twenty minutes that are usually ample for an intelligent scanning of the morning journal, are by many lengthened into golden hours, during which their minds are surfeited with every unclean detail of a day's crimes. Assuredly, the result must be calamitous for them, morally and intellectually. I venture not too much in saying that, in a period of ten years the ordinary newspaper slave wastes more time than would be sufficient for a fair course in history; and it is equally certain that such readers are wofully ignorant of what is great and good in human life, their narrow minds and dwarfed hearts crowding out all influences save those of contemporary misfortune or iniquity. Charles Lamb was right when he said "no one ever lays down a newspaper without a feeling of disappointment."

"There are among the newspapers of the day a large number which look at men and things from the standpoint of the superficial cynic, or the 'man of the world.' When a paper lacks sincerity and purpose in what it says, and habitually sneers and jests, that paper is a good one to let alone. To this class belong too many of our daily newspapers, in which a real apprehension of the seriousness of life, and of its nobility and beauty, seems utterly lacking. The habitual reading of such

papers is enough to make one a joker without wit, a critic without knowledge, a loafer rather than a worker, a grimacing, monkey-like looker-on rather than a soldier in the battle of life. These are strong words; but if the reading of certain papers I could name, and which my readers could name, does not have this effect, it is due to the reader rather than the newspaper." [36]

"There is a good time coming," wrote Father Fitzgerald, almost twenty-five years ago, in that capital book he called "Caseine;" "but when you find all the dullards of the press, all the bores, all the pretended scholars, all the pretended wits, disarmed of that dangerous weapon, the pen, believe me, the millennium is at hand, at your very door. But the signs of the times point not to such a millennium as that, but to a millennium of the same old boredom, the same impertinent ignorance and puppyism that has disgraced the press from the beginning." This is good, quite refreshing; and honest observers must admit that "Caseine" said something like a prophecy. Would that even now we could see even the beginning of the end of the reign of the unclean illustrated papers, of sensational weeklies, of the so-called comic publications, with their weight of weary, would-be jokes, and of these dailies that labor, not to foster a healthy

[36] Richardson.

public spirit — not to elevate the tone of their readers, but to keep low and to drag lower the appetites that so eagerly crave their unwholesome diet, and to which they so unscrupulously cater. Apart from their other faults, stupidity is the common mark of such sheets. To every member of this guild, the lines of Dryden are applicable, —

> "Let him rail on, let his invective muse
> Have four and twenty letters to abuse,
> Which if he jumbles to one line of sense,
> Indict him of a capital offence."

I would not be understood as raising a foolish outcry against newspapers. They are useful; can do much good. I would advise that choice of them be determined by their general intelligence, their cleanness, their honesty, their freedom from sensationalism and bigotry. That a journal agrees with you in politics is not a sufficient reason for you to take it, if otherwise it does not attain a proper standard. Nor should you subscribe for a paper because its owner or editor happens to be a Catholic, if otherwise it is dull, heavy, stupid. Still, we cannot have an honest and efficient press without an honest and efficient support, and on this point the consciences of many Catholics ought to twitch them. Our weeklies are quite up to the average, though they are often restricted because of limited means; while the people for whom they labor, with

literary ability at least up to the standard of their clients, and often far above this standard, are the very individuals who most seriously cripple their work through an indifference that is practically equivalent to hostility. I charge many Catholics with weighty responsibility on this point. They seem to be insensible to the plain truth that the press is a most powerful instrument for good or for evil, a truth fully acknowledged by the Holy Father, by the Council of Baltimore, by all thinking men. The secular press of the United States is fair to Catholics, as a rule; but on many important points those who conduct these newspapers are not intelligently informed. George Parsons Lathrop, who has had experience, says, that "The secular press would be a powerful agency for the correction of misstatements, for the popular newspaper reaches the eyes of many who would never consent to examine a Catholic book or journal. But while there are great numbers of Catholics employed on the daily newspapers, they are not their own masters. Under hostile editors, they do not enjoy the reputed American privilege of free speech. Everything they write is carefully examined, sifted, and cut down where there is the slightest chance that they may be saying anything which will make the Catholic position clear, and place Catholicity in a fair, impartial light. In

many newspaper offices it seems to be a maxim that a man who believes nothing is a perfectly safe person to entrust with Catholic matters. It is also held to be a merit in any Protestant writer on the staff to do what he can towards reporting and presenting Protestantism favorably, but for a Catholic to put his convictions into what he writes for the daily columns, or to shed light upon the truth of his religion, is treated as something in the nature of a conspiracy." For a right understanding of Catholic events, for a proper discussion of Catholic questions, for such correction of errors as may be necessary, for the maintenance of a channel of communication of reliable information on church matters, the support of a Catholic press is much to be desired.

IX. — NOVELS.

If it be true that the novel is the last stage of prose in its progress towards poetry,[37] perhaps we are coming to a new era, for assuredly the novel seems now to enjoy undisputed sway. It is less than two hundred years since the English novel took its rise. The author of Robinson Crusoe may justly be considered its father.[38] Richardson, Field-

[37] John Bascom.

[38] How far he and his immediate successors were indebted to Cervantes, the author of Don Quixote, it would be difficult to say, but they probably found, at least, the inspiration of encouragement.

ing, and Smollet worked on the line marked out by Defoe; but if we judge by Fielding, we would conclude that religion no longer held sway over society. However, I am not here concerned with the characteristics of these writers, nor need I analyze their successors, — Scott, who dwelt in a spirit land of chivalry, and whose "romances are so upright, so delicate, so true, when he resists the temptation to blacken the monks;" [39] Dickens, who pictured the poor and lowly, and strove for social reforms; Thackeray, the great searcher of hearts and master of character delineation; Charles Reade, who laid bare the abuses of prisons and asylums; George Eliot, that subtile woman who moralized in a human way, having no God; Bulwer, a brilliant man, who wrote much and often wrote meanly; or many others, whom I do not name. To-day an army of novelists is in the field. Judgment and discrimination must, therefore, hold sway in our dealing with the question of "light reading." F. Marion Crawford, whose versatility and ability easily place him in the front rank of living novelists, has recently published a brochure, "The novel —What It Is." I take from him a few suggestive points. He tells us that the novel is an intellectual artistic luxury — "a definition which can be made to include a good deal, but which is, in reality,

[39] The Abbé Roux.

a closer one than it appears to be at first sight. No one, I think, will deny that it covers the three principal essentials of the novel as it should be, of a story or romance, which in itself and in the manner of telling it shall appeal to the intellect, shall satisfy the requirements of art, and shall be a luxury, in that it can be of no use to a man when he is at work, but may conduce to peace of mind and delectation during his hours of idleness."

No reasonable man will deny that fiction thus understood has a just place in literature, and that it deserves recognition as a factor in our innocent recreation. But the field claimed as its own by the novel has been invaded. "A man buys what purports to be a work of fiction, a romance, a novel, a story of adventure; pays his money, takes his book home, prepares to enjoy it at his ease, and discovers that he has paid a dollar for somebody's views on socialism, religion, or the divorce laws. . . . In ordinary cases the 'purpose' novel is a simple fraud, besides being a failure in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand." [40]

The historical novel is another diversion from the true spirit of fiction and imaginative literature, though there need not be injurious effects from such reading unless it is taken as an absolute substitute for genuine history. Any attempt abso-

[40] F. Marion Crawford.

lutely to displace the novel as an element in our modern literature would be bigoted and unreasonable, and would meet with failure. Our duty is to regulate the reading of fiction, and to check any tendency towards such appetite for it as would render solid study irksome. The novel may, indeed, serve as a recreation, as a teacher of useful, worldly experience; but it must not be adopted for a steady course of reading. Agnes Repplier, the delightful Catholic essayist, touches lightly, yet strongly, on this question, in speaking "of the modern girl who at ten or twelve aspires to something partly grown up, to those nondescript tales, which, trembling on the brink of sentiment, seem afraid to risk the plunge; who, with her appetite whetted by a course of this unsatisfactory diet, is soon ripe for a little more excitement, and a great deal more love-making; and so she graduates into Rhoda Broughton and the Duchess, at which point her intellectual career is closed. She has no idea of what she has missed in the world of books. She tells you that she 'don't care for Dickens,' and 'can't get interested in Scott,' with a placidity that plainly shows she lays the blame for this state of affairs on the two great masters who have amused and charmed the world. She has probably never read a single masterpiece of our language; she has never been moved by a noble poem, or stirred to the quick by

a well-told page of history; she has never opened the pores of her mind for the reception of vigorous thought, or the solution of a mental problem; yet she may be daily found in the circulating library, and is seldom visible on the street without a book or two under her arm."

And dear old Dr. Holmes admirably illustrates my point: "The daughters of Danaus" he says, "are not all dead yet; on the contrary, their number is legion. All those young women who pass their days and nights in reading endless story books — novels, so called, doubtless, from their want of novelty — what are they doing but pouring water into buckets whose bottoms are as full of holes as a colander, and which would have nothing to show if Niagara had been emptied into them?"

This sounds like Cowper: —

> "And novels (witness every month's review)
> Belie their name and offer nothing new."

And listen to a few words of Carlyle's vigorous English. He is writing of fashionable novels. "That tough faculty of reading, for which the world will not refuse me credit, was here for the first time foiled and set at naught. In vain that I summoned my whole energies, and did my very utmost; at the end of some short space, I was uniformly seized with not so much what I can call a drumming in my ears, as a kind of infinite, un-

sufferable Jew's-harping and scrannel-piping there; to which the frightfullest species of magnetic sleep soon supervened. And if I strove to shake this away, and absolutely would not yield, there came a hitherto unfelt sensation, as of *delirium tremens*, and a melting into total deliquium, till at last, by order of the doctor, dreading ruin to my whole intellectual and bodily faculties, and a general breaking-up of the constitution, I reluctantly but determinedly forbore." Accept this in spirit and truth, and you will have a wise man's experience to guide you.[41]

About the novel and the novel-reader, Maurice Francis Egan, who can speak authoritatively, has written words of warning: "If there were no harm in them, these novels would be as unhealthy as a constant diet of pies and caramels and pickles would be." "The inveterate novel-reader cannot be induced to read history; a volume of fine essays or a book of devotion is impossible to him. He has created a false appetite. He will henceforth have only condiments. He will take horse-radish, but not the roast beef; the mustard, but not the cold ham; and the cranberry sauce, but not the turkey." "Bad books have ruined as many men

[41] For another vivid picture of this evil, read Goldsmith's "Letters from a Citizen of the World," Letter No. 53. Consult also Brother Azarias' "Books and Reading," Section VI.; and Ruskin's Lecture, "Of Queens' Gardens," No. 77.

as bad whiskey; and sentimental love-stories have made as many women useless, and unworthy of their high destiny, as evil companions." "The vast swarm of novels, like the Egyptian locusts, devour everything green. They turn the young in heart old before their time. If the sentimental novel could be suppressed, there would be much less misery in the world." "No one who expects to do good mental work can subsist chiefly on novels, for constant novel-reading, even when the novels are good, is bad for every faculty." At their best, they cannot impart comprehensive knowledge; they cannot take the place of earnest study. They are not intended for the real business of life. An indulgence they may be (though Charles Lamb said he could never listen to even the better class of them without extreme irksomeness), but not a serious pursuit. Their true purpose is relaxation, to which, from time to time, every industrious worker is entitled. Therefore, I say, read a first-class novel now and then, but observe the limitations.

X. — READING FOR CHILDREN.

My work would not be complete if I failed to speak in behalf of the little ones in Christ. The saddest strain in the Lamentations of Jeremiah

is the wail of the little ones crying for bread when there was no one to break it to them. Parents, who may read this book, look to your children! They cry for the bread of the word, for the food of the mind; it is your duty to break it to them. Stand guard lest the enemy poison their young hearts! Give to them the benefit of your experience, of your mistakes! Teach them what to read, and after stimulating their appetite, furnish the means of satisfying it. Children weary of "don't." Be not content, therefore, with pointing out the dangerous; show them the good. And in this be not over-rigorous in your notion of good.

"Leave to the child, at least, his clear, intuitive, unbiassed enjoyment, his sympathy with things that have been. He is not so easily hurt as we suppose; he is strong in his elastic ignorance, and has no need of a pepsin pill with every mouthful of literary food he swallows. Mental hygiene, it is said, is apt to lead to mental valetudinarianism; but if we are to turn our very nurseries into hot-beds of prigs, we may say once more what was said when Chapelain published his portentous epic, that a new horror had been added to the accomplishment of reading."[42] Let the children enjoy the liberty of the spirit; and if your means permit furnish your homes with such a library as the well-known

[42] Agnes Repplier.

educator, George E. Hardy, has indicated in his valuable compilation, "Five Hundred Books for the Young."[43]

You should contribute to the increased circulation of good books; you should encourage a greater demand for them. The question for all honest men and women is: "Will literature, on the whole, be a nurse of the virtues, or a pander to vice? There is neither a rural village nor a mighty city the peace of which will not one day depend upon the answer which time must make to such questions."[44] We should anticipate; we should shape the future answer; we should determine it for the right. When Dr. Holmes was once asked when a child's education should begin, he answered, "One hundred years before it is born." Look ahead. Recognize not only your duty, but the surrounding danger that makes your responsibility more weighty. Believe me that "so mighty an agent for the elevation of men as the million-tongued press has also been long used for the degradation and ruin of all that is beautiful and pure in character."[45] Be on your guard too against such reading as tends to weaken children's minds, because sufficient con-

[43] Published by the Scribners, New York.

[44] Aubrey de Vere.

[45] Report of New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, 1876.

sideration is not given to their power of mental grasp. "It is a mistake to write down to the understanding of children."[46] The Abbé Roux emphasizes this point, which is of the greatest importance, when he says that much of the current literature for children is too childish. And Agnes Repplier, who has given some thought to the subject of children's reading, affords me another apt quotation: "Books that children read but once are of scant service to them; those that have really helped to warm our imaginations and to train our faculties are the few old friends we know so well that they have become a portion of our thinking selves. To me it seems doubtful if the flood of juvenile literature, though good, and an antidote against poison, be an unalloyed good." It would be well, therefore, if parents would once more become children with their little ones, encouraging them to read, reading to them, reading with them; giving them suggestions and advice rather than inflexible direction; urging them to think for themselves; making their reading a pleasant and a winning occupation.

> "'Twere well with most, if books that could engage
> Their childhood, pleased them at a riper age."[47]

A special warning: Beware lest your children

[46] Sir Walter Scott. [47] Cowper.

buy and read novels, chiefly because of their catching titles, for often the most dangerous doctrines, corrupting and abominable, are insinuated in such books ; sacred things are mocked at, and the holiest institutions ridiculed. It is easy to make a good beginning, but once let the young read indifferently whatever stuff may come to hand, and the task of later reform will be a hard one; indeed, with some it will never be accomplished. Remember Bolingbroke's word : " To set about acquiring the habits of meditation and study late in life is like getting into a go-cart with a gray beard, and learning to walk when we have lost the use of our legs." Speaking several years ago of the indifference of parents, and of their neglect, under pretence of business pressure, to superintend their children's reading, a well-known Protestant clergyman used the following strong language : " If your children were threatened with typhoid fever, would you have time to go for the doctor ? Would you have time to watch the progress of the disease ? Would you have time for the funeral ? In the presence of God, I warn you of the fact that your children are threatened with moral and spiritual typhoid, and that unless the thing be stopped, it will be to them funeral of body, funeral of mind, funeral of soul — three funerals in one day." His words are none too strong.

It is said that Renan's misguided love for reading made him a pantheist while still a youth, and that Dr. Doellinger's defection from the church has been traced to ill-advised reading in later life.

I do not mean that the young should be old, nor that your children should read only religious papers and pious books. Let the boys and girls abound in their youthful spirits, and may these long remain with them. But keep their minds from error, and their hearts from evil. Give them, in measure and form suited to their years, just what you yourself should read. Encourage, I would say, a taste for reading, or rouse the appetite if it be dormant. Whet it, stimulate it; but control it by judicious restraint, otherwise it may prove a curse.[48]

[48] Hear also the words of a venerable writer, suggesting a phase of this question sometimes overlooked:

"Books that speak through the eye may be the worst of tempters. No tempters can be worse than bad books. And they are especially bad when the badness is concealed; when that which is concealed, if expressed in explicit grossness, would shock and repel; but when thinly veiled it is read without a blush, and the heart is poisoned before it is aware. Such books are whispers with fair faces and foul hearts." CARDINAL MANNING.

CONCLUSION.

CONCLUSION.

OUR work is nearly finished; but, good reader, hear a parting word, a conclusion! I find it difficult to put off the preacher's style, and thus I would exhort. Love books; hold them, with Lord Bacon, as very shrines where precious relics are preserved! I think it was Sydney Smith who said that, even if they were unread, books were the best furniture in the house. Yield to the insensible but irresistible sway of a habit of good reading, and you will experience its civilizing, its refining, its spiritualizing influence. You will disprove Ruskin's horrible statement that modern education for the most part signifies giving people the faculty of thinking wrong on every conceivable subject of importance to them. You will rather realize Emerson's cheerful word, and become such good readers that you will make books good; that is, you will discover meanings and truths that will seem like confidences intended only for you.

You will become witnesses of the doctrine that people fond of good books cannot be mean or sordid, but must be lofty and high-spirited souls. Among these, I do not include the unfortunately large number who, according to a recent writer, spend their time devouring the chopped straw of a "circulating library," as contentedly and as thoughtlessly as cattle grazing in a fresh meadow.[1] Follow, I would say, the spirit of the suggestions offered in this book, and you will serenely sail the vast seas of time, thus sharing in the wisdom, illuminations, and inventions of all ages. But this voyage will involve a "great responsibility, and we cannot shirk that responsibility. Ours is the duty to develop and to make perfect our whole nature: therefore must we look to our intellectual growth and progress. Books are the great means by which we are expected to achieve this. They are the reflectors by which the light of God's truth is flashed into the mind; but self, and passion, and prejudice are so many absorbents, leaving but a few rays to glimmer through the darkness. Let us select those books giving out the truth most clearly and convincingly; they will supply us with the needed warmth and light — so

[1] "Be sure the books are not heaped up as they fall out of the package of the circulating library, wet with the last and lightest spray of the fountain of folly." — RUSKIN.

far as human agencies can supply us — to walk in the path of right and duty. Let your reading be such as will imbue you with exalted ideas of manhood and of womanhood. Eschew those authors who would destroy the roseate hues of the morning of life, and leave the soul to be consumed in the contemplation of a parched and arid waste of human nature, from which all good has been extracted, and upon which the dews of Heaven no longer fall, to freshen the flowers of virtue; for according to these men, there is neither virtue, nor a Heaven, nor a God." The distinguished writer, Brother Azarias, from whose "Books and Reading" I take the preceding thought, concludes his warning by a just censure of those book-makers who call themselves social physicians, "who, under pretence of enlightening men, spread the germs of disease among those who are attracted around the putrid corpse they would openly dissect." It is, therefore, only from the divine fountains of Faith, Hope, and Charity that the waters of life can be drawn; and only that literature which dutifully recognizes God will avail us in the noble work of "making our lives sublime."

The enemies of truth, and, therefore, of God, have endeavored to drive Him out of history, out of all literature; but on this point I recall the opening sentence of the famous "Essays of Donoso

Cortes," and the application seems to me to be easy. "In his 'Confessions of a Revolutionist,' M. Proudhon has written these remarkable words: 'It is wonderful how we always stumble on theology in all our political questions.' There is nothing here to cause surprise, but the surprise of M. Proudhon. Theology, in as much as it is the science of God, is the ocean which contains and embraces all sciences, as God is the ocean which contains and embraces all things." The involuntary testimony of its enemies to the power of truth, for this is theology, enforces our claim that the literature which excludes God is paganism, without the religious trappings that gave the idolatries of old a semblance of religious respectability. Such literature claims brilliant names; but herein may be greater danger, though on deeper insight we realize the truth of another utterance of Donoso Cortes, which, though without direct reference to our subject, bears yet most pertinently on it. "We have all seen pass before our eyes ages of prodigious incredulity and high culture, which have left a track behind, less luminous than inflamed, in the prolongation of time, and have shone with phosphoric light in history. Fix your eyes on them, however, — look at them again and again, and you shall see that their splendors are as conflagrations, and they illumine only because they are

lightning. One would say that their illumination proceeds from the sudden explosion of materials in themselves obscure but inflammable, rather than from the pure regions where is engendered that gentle light softly diffused over the arches of heaven by the inimitable pencil of the Sovereign Painter."[2]

Be not deceived by the glare of this lurid light, whether the question involved be one of politics, of history, or of literature in its broadest scope. Seek the pure and enduring light that emanates from the true and sovereign Light; and believe me that you will find it in brilliant rays and very floods in the noble books of all time. "In the great church at Moscow, the porch is adorned with portraits of the most eminent sages and philosophers of antiquity, as if to hint that, though not within the church, they were still in its outer courts; and so with the mind nobly religious: though the inner shrine be sacred to names about which there is no dispute, the good is recognized in its approaches."[3]

Be grateful for the blessings you enjoy; grow in familiarity with the men and women who have been justly renowned in their day and who are

[2] "Here's the world half-blind
With intellectual life, half-brutalized
With civilization."

MRS. BROWNING.

[3] Geikie.

honored in ours; but remember that your reading is not a final goal; it is only a means to an end. This end is your own moral and spiritual development, your more efficient work for the welfare of others, and the glory of God through all. [4]

For God, then, should we labor, that His purpose may not fail, and that our end may be secure. In this spirit pray and strive for the speedy coming of the day when we shall have a true literature, a noble national literature, a literature inspired by Catholicity, beautified by Catholicity, enriched by Catholicity, spiritualized by Catholicity, dominated by Catholicity, the only literature worthy of man

[4] "I will only bid you study three books, and they will last your life. The first book is God. Look up into the face of God. Live in the light of His presence. Walk to and fro in your daily life amidst the perfections of God, of His justice, of His sanctity, of His purity, of His truth, of His mercy, of His beauty, until, by walking in the midst of that light, you receive some of its brightness, and read all things by its clearness. The next book is Jesus Himself. This is what St. Paul meant when he said: "I account all things to be loss for the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He meant that he set before himself the life of his Master, that he read beneath the outward life, and entered into the mind of Jesus Christ, that he made the Sacred Heart of Jesus to be the manual of his contemplation. And the third and last book is your own self. When you have the light of God and the vision of the perfections of Jesus Christ in your intellect, then look into your own hearts. See what is your own state, and shape, and color in the sight of God. The study of these three books will light up in you a threefold science: the science of God, the science of Jesus, and the science of self-knowledge."

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or acceptable to the Creator. Asking this, we ask a great blessing for our beloved country. [5]

[5] I have abstained from any attempt at making a list of books, feeling, with Dr. Holmes, that on this point I would rather receive than give advice. Nor do I consider it a deviation from this rule to refer to Cardinal Newman. I do not wish to call attention in a general way to this great master of English, who excelled as poet, philosopher, theologian, essayist, preacher, novelist, historian; nor is it necessary to recommend the reading of his works. I merely desire to state that the study of his "Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent," and of his "Idea of a University," will be found of great advantage in the training of the mind, and the disciplining of its faculties, and that an understanding of these works will be an excellent preparation for further intelligent inquiry in the field of Letters as well as that of Science.

J. M. J. D.

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